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THE UNBROKEN LINE

THE UNBROKEN LINE

ALONG THE FRENCH TRENCHES FROM
SWITZERLAND TO THE NORTH SEA

BY

H. WARNER ALLEN

THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BRITISH PRESS
WITH THE FRENCH ARMIES IN THE FIELD (1915-1916)

"Les Français, quand ils sont bien conduits, peuvent avoir ce courage patient, qui est quelquefois aussi nécessaire que l'ardeur impétueuse qu'on leur accorde."—VOLTAIRE.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

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MAP OF THE UNBROKEN LINE *At end of Text*

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ENGLISH MILES



THE UNBROKEN LINE

CHAPTER I

THE EXTREME RIGHT : ALSACE

THE Swiss frontier is a curiously tame and inadequate conclusion to the great barrier of fortifications, 500 miles long, that protects from German invasion a tiny fragment of Belgium and the greater part of France. An inaccessible precipice, some natural obstacle serenely defiant of all human artillery and impregnable as no artificial fortress ever can be, would have been a fitting end. The North Sea provides a clear and definite limit to the line on the extreme left, though in point of fact it is not an end at all, since there the iron ring that is strangling Germany is carried northwards by the British navy to the enemy's home waters and severs him from all the seas.

It is at Pfetterhausen, a mile or so within what was once German territory, that the French lines meet the Swiss frontier. Here, in the gap between the Jura and the Vosges, the "Trouée de Belfort," there is no great natural obstacle to bar the way, and the maze of trenches which guards 500 miles of front ends in a barbed wire fence such as might enclose an English meadow and over which a child three years old could clamber.

In December, 1915, there were about twenty miles of French trenches to every mile of front. In one section there were 375 kilometres, or slightly over 234 miles, of trenches to a front of ten miles, and another seventy-five kilometres of trenches were being dug. As a general rule a division had about 250 miles of trenches to look after, and an army corps anything between 450 and 500 miles. But in point of fact these figures six months later were very considerably below the mark, as in every part of the front new fortifications were continually being constructed, and it is probable that the full length of the French trenches, including the English lines, was by the middle of August, 1916, nearer 15,000 miles than 10,000.

As for the thousands of miles of barbed wire that protected these fortifications, the figure is beyond calculation, since an entanglement might consist of ten, twenty, forty, or even more parallel lines of barbed wire, crossed and recrossed inextricably. Undoubtedly the German lines represented an equal expenditure of barbed wire and labour, and the whole achievement may be aptly compared to two enormous opposing mediæval castles, built nearly as deep underground as the ancient walls were above it and each with a length of 500 miles and a breadth of anything between two and five miles.

It is easy to understand that a man, even if he knows his own section of trenches thoroughly, can lose himself utterly in the labyrinth as soon as he leaves his own ground. Since the beginning of the war I have walked through trenches more miles than I can count, and I should be sorry to say how many times we



THE EXTREME RIGHT: THE FRONTIER BARRI^{ER} NEAR
PFETTERHAUSEN, ALSACE.



CHRISTMAS IN ALSACE, 1915.

[See p. 18.

have lost our way, although provided with the most experienced guides available. There are notice boards and directions up at every turn, but unfortunately to the profane these directions are quite unintelligible. A hand pointing to "Section B 11," or to the "Boyaux Blanc," or to "AR 3" conveys but very little to anyone who has not a map of the lines in his pocket.

One night an unhappy paymaster, full of zeal, set out with the pay for a regiment in the front trenches. He was anxious that the men should have their sous punctually to the day, even though they were posted in a place where, to put it mildly, money has not its customary value. Accompanied by his clerk, he started off at seven o'clock in the evening. He thought that he knew the trenches, but the first thing he did was to take a wrong turning. He blundered on as best he could through the night, and was passed on from one section to another. He and his clerk returned to their quarters in the rear at four o'clock in the morning, both utterly worn out, but after all their exertions they had not found the regiment they were looking for.

It has been said that a man could enter the Great Ditch, which is the rampart of civilisation, at the North Sea and could make his way along it, always below the level of the ground, till after many days he came out on the Swiss frontier. Strictly speaking, the feat is an impossible one, as the continuity of the trenches is broken in consequence of geographical conditions, but for practical purposes it is a sufficiently accurate expression of a fact.

If any adventurous person had toiled along the Great Ditch from the North Sea down to Alsace, he

would certainly have been astonished at what he saw when he emerged from the narrow earthen walls which had shut him in throughout his journey, except for the brief moments when, in some mountainous district, he was able to come to the surface. At Pfetterhausen, after the vast and complicated wire entanglements, a mere fence seemed utterly absurd as a military barrier. A few pieces of red and white canvas tied to the wires showed that at this point the neutral territory of Switzerland began, and served as a warning to any soldier who might be tempted to carry war across the boundary line. Behind a movable barrier across the road a single stolid Swiss sentry stood with bayonet fixed, and but for him the scene would have been as placid and unwarlike as conceivable.

The trenches were hidden in the woods 500 yards away. There was no sentry near the barrier on the French side when I visited Pfetterhausen, and one might have thought the place was quite without defence, though in truth it was guarded as securely as any part of the line. To anyone who had been long accustomed to the idea of an impassable barrier separating the opposing forces the thought that a short walk in the open would, if the Swiss sentry would only allow it, take him right behind the German advanced lines, seemed absurdly fantastic. An American who was with me was anxious to attempt this adventure, but unhappily the Swiss authorities were uncompromising in their refusal.

We had driven to the Swiss frontier through the Trouée de Belfort, which offers so inviting a passage into France to the invader from the East. We had passed at full speed along roads protected from German

eyes by tall screens of brushwood. At one point, where we were in full view of the enemy, the car broke down and could not be started again for five or ten minutes. The German gunners usually shelled everything they could see at that particular spot, and our car was a very big one ; but the chauffeur, accustomed to such incidents, went about his work in leisurely fashion, and for some reason or other the enemy ignored us, probably because the rain had driven most of his men under cover.

Finally we reached the village of Pfetterhausen, which had been much damaged by German shells. " It is bombarded every day," said the officer with us, and to prove his words a shell went hurtling overhead and exploded in a field a few hundred yards away. Once through the half-ruined village, we were in the zone that was sacrosanct from both French and German shells and bullets. Here one could walk above ground without danger, since—at that period, at any rate—Germany would not run the risk of creating an international incident with Switzerland by ruffling her sturdy neutrality.

By a sentry box there stood the man whom the General had called "*l'homme de l'extrême droite*"—the sentry who guarded the extreme point of the French right wing. He was a *douanier*—a customs officer. So long as he stood there on duty with fixed bayonet, he was in perfect safety, but as soon as he was relieved and went away to rest in the neighbouring village he entered the danger zone and might at any time receive a German shell.

The Swiss sentry saluted at the sight of the French officer with us, and a Swiss sergeant came out of the

neighbouring guardhouse on our arrival. We had a little conversation across the fence that divided Switzerland from France, and then he proceeded to the formality which he called "opening the frontier." Half the barrier across the road was moved aside and replaced by a long wooden table. From the French side there appeared a number of peasant women with large baskets. Their papers were examined by *l'homme de l'extrême droite*, and they were allowed to pass. Then buying and selling began across the frontier counter. The Swiss Government allowed peasants in the French frontier villages to buy provisions and the like from the Swiss shopkeepers who brought their wares to the frontier, provided that certain articles did not go out of the country. It was curious to watch the women gossiping and bargaining as though they were at a market in some peaceful country village, and to remember that scarcely 500 yards away there were men with their fingers on the triggers of their rifles, watching for the slightest sign of the enemy hidden in the opposing trenches, and ready to fire at the smallest warning.

In December, 1915, Pfetterhausen and the neighbouring villages, Seppois-le-Haut and Seppois-le-Bas, had suffered considerably from shell-fire, but life went on very much as usual, except that when a bombardment began the whole population retired into bomb-proof shelters and waited until it was over before they resumed their daily round. Chance has never taken me to those villages again, but I have heard from friends who have visited them that they have been completely ruined by German shells and have now been evacuated by all civilians.

At Seppois-le-Haut there was an old-fashioned inn which was famous not only for its good cheer, but also for its landlord's pretty daughters. When we arrived there early one morning we were received, in a great room filled with old-world furniture, by one of the fair daughters of the house, with that charming mixture of friendliness, hospitality, and independence that is characteristic of Alsace. The inn was crowded with officers, but the resources of "mine host" were equal to any test, and there was no shortage of good wine and good food; and such a greeting was given to the French as befitted welcome and long-awaited guests. The eldest daughter of the house had a treasure which she prized above everything: a tablecloth on which every high personage who had visited the recovered territory had inscribed his signature, to be piously worked over by its owner in silk. Nothing could have been more homely and peaceful than the scene in this Alsatian inn, and the roar of the cannon outside could not mar its tranquillity. The girls did not even look up when a specially loud explosion told that a German shell had landed a few hundred yards away on the hillside above the village.

Familiarity with shells breeds among the men and women exposed to them a kind of fatalism that is akin to contempt. It is all the purest luck, and when a man's hour has come nothing can save him. Hundreds of shells will expend all their force in tearing up a plot of barren ground, and nobody a straw the worse. Then suddenly from the blue there will fall a chance shot, dropping, perhaps, in the midst of a group of officers and doing terrible execution. In one case within my knowledge a four-inch time shell

exploded just over the heads of a colonel, a major, and two captains of a regiment who were standing talking in a sunken road. From such a case there is no human escape, or, as the French soldiers say, "*Un coup pareil ne pardonne pas.*"

Even to the least imaginative Englishman there is a thrill of joy and exaltation at the moment of crossing the frontier into Alsace. To the patriotic Frenchman this sensation is something beyond description. After forty-five years to see the tricolour once more flying over a land that has always been French in feeling and has for so long been a martyr among the nations is the realisation of a dream almost beyond hope, and one can imagine what were the feelings of the French officers who at the beginning of the war first crossed the boundary. "Never," said an officer to me, "shall I forget the emotion I felt when my horse crossed the frontier line at the beginning of August, 1914. It was the entry into the promised land—the land which for over forty years we had been waiting to set free!"

When the French marched victoriously into Alsace, there were many old Alsatians who remembered the agony of 1870. The troops, as they marched from the frontier towards the Rhine, passed beneath a rain of flowers thrown to them by fair Alsatians, and the old men who were young in the days of the great disaster stood motionless at attention, only moving to salute the colours, as the French *chasseurs* marched through the towns and villages. The Germans heard of the reception given to these welcome invaders, and did not conceal their disgust at this proof of their failure to germanise the annexed provinces. They sent a

message to the rebellious Alsatians: "You have received the French with roses, but some day soon we shall return with forget-me-nots!"

The old frontier is marked by the former custom-houses and a wooden barrier, guarded by a French Territorial, to stop motor-cars for examination. These barriers, which are characteristic of Alsace, consist of a wooden gate that can be raised perpendicularly into the air by the counterbalancing weight of a heavy stone, to allow the motorist to pass when his papers have been verified. The old frontier posts have long ago been torn up and have for the most part disappeared, the first trophies of the French advance.

The Alsatian prefers German shells in war to German rule in peace, and he shows his satisfaction by his greeting to the French uniform. The French peasant is an independent person, and takes his time before he makes way for a motor-car, even though it be military and travelling at fifty miles an hour. The Alsatian peasant does everything in his power not to impede the military cars, which are one of the outward signs of the liberation of his country, and never an officer passes but the farmer or carter salutes him with a respectful wave of his hat. The children, too, respect the regulations concerning the salute as though they were private soldiers, and vie with one another in saying "*Bonjour!*" to every Frenchman who passes them in the street.

The Alsatian is a man of originality and tradition. He has made for himself customs and manners that he values beyond price as the expression of his race. He has always known that France would leave him to follow his own special traditions. If he wished to

wear his picturesque native costume and if he wished to talk German or his native dialect, no Frenchman would say him nay. Not so the German. In the selfish arrogance of his *Kultur*, the German has tried to standardise mankind and make the whole world like unto himself. Variety, instead of being a joy in his sight, is revolting to his narrow mind, so after 1870 he set to work to force the Alsatian into the German mould, and the Alsatian, with admirable pertinacity, fought to retain his individuality.

One has only to glance at an Alsatian village to understand the vast gulf that divides the Alsatian from Prussian mentality. Little houses, with great wooden beams showing through the coloured walls; bright tiles of many hues upon the roofs; shutters blue, red, pink, and green; and quaintly fashioned eaves which overhang the road—there is an order in this riot of variety, but it is an order that the Prussian imagination could never conceive. Never was a race less fitted to submit to German tyranny. It is easy to imagine the thankfulness with which the Alsatian received his liberation at the hands of France. Yet at the beginning of the war he was probably less confident of victory than any other section of the enemies of Germany. Close contact and bitter experience had brought home to him the material power and organisation of the German Empire. To-day he realises to the full the achievements of France in checking that first German offensive which had behind it the force of forty years' deliberate preparation for war.

The French have set to work to organise in a tactful and businesslike fashion those portions of the annexed

provinces that they were able to retain after their advance to Mühlhausen and subsequent retreat. Officers of known administrative capacity have been set in charge of the various districts, with the title of "*Administrateur du Territoire*," and as a rule they are men who know the country. Most of the Alsatians of military age have of their own free will gone to the interior of France, where they are safe in any eventuality from the enemy and where they are extremely useful in making munitions. Those Alsatians who wished to serve in the French army have been incorporated.

An *Administrateur* who is responsible for some thirty thousand Alsatians—by far the greater number of them women and children—explained to me his method. "Firmness is the essential thing. The Alsatian, like everyone else, insists on having his grumble at any innovation. But as soon as he realises that we are only working for his good and understands that we respect his local traditions and customs we have no more difficulty with him." A small but instructive example of the conscientious way in which the French are administering Alsace was given by a fact which I noted on my last visit there. One of the main problems which the *Administrateur* was considering was the revival of the German system of industrial insurance in the factories that were still working in the fighting zone.

It is a small thing but significant that to-day the Alsatians have painted out the German signs on their walls and replaced them by the French equivalent. No pressure whatever was applied to them in this matter, and twelve months ago they contented them-

selves with nailing up wooden signs which could easily be taken down. Now, however, the French words are boldly painted on the wall, a certain sign of confidence.

Of all the forms of French propaganda in Alsace the most important is undoubtedly the school. The schoolhouse which I visited stood half-way through a certain bombarded valley. In its wall there was a shell-hole, ragged and new, but work was going on just the same, despite the danger. The children, like their parents, were well accustomed to bombardment. At the first whistling sound of a shell approaching, they disappeared into the bomb-proof shelters and waited quite unconcernedly until German rage had spent itself. Then they darted out into the street again, hunting for splinters, and the urchin who was lucky enough to discover a whole fuse—the raw material for trench rings—was generally envied and admired by his companions.

Alphonse Daudet has told in one of his best-known "Contes du Lundi" the story of the last lesson given by a French schoolmaster in Alsace before the iron rule of Prussia forbade the teaching of French in the annexed provinces. The last words that the schoolmaster wrote on the blackboard were "*Vive la France!*" "Then he stayed there motionless, with his head resting against the wall, and with his hand he signed to the children: '*C'est fini! Allez-vous-en!*'" After forty-five years French is once again taught in the schools of Alsace. After all, it was not "finished," as Daudet's schoolmaster thought, when he heard the Prussian bugles outside his schoolroom windows!

Nothing could be more surprising than the progress which had been made by the children since my previous

visit to Alsace, scarcely six months before. Under German rule it was only the rich who secretly kept up in their families the tradition of the French language and of French thought. For the poor German was compulsory in the schools, and among themselves they talked only the Alsatian *patois*. Now French has become for them a familiar tongue. I have heard children teaching one another French in the street, and every child makes a point of saying "*Bonjour!*" to the French officer who passes. One little girl was saying "good-bye" to a relation, apparently an aunt. "*Auf wiedersehen!*" said the aunt. "No!" said the child, indignantly; "we are French now! *Au revoir!*"

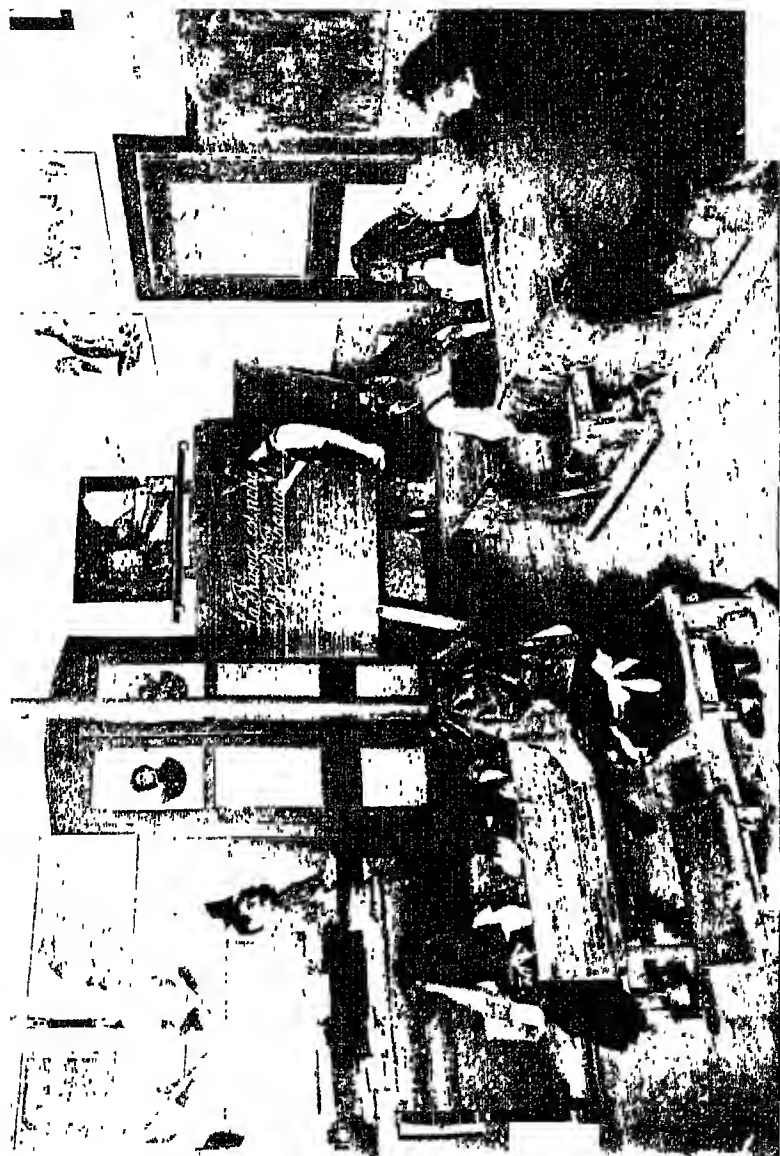
The *Administrateur du Territoire* is a captain, who exercises his paternal power throughout a large and important valley. As we went into the schoolroom, at the sight of the captain's uniform the children rose and received us with a unanimous "*Bonjour!*" Then the master, a professor from a famous Paris school, explained to us what his class, which consisted of boys of about twelve, was engaged in learning. The lesson was one in French composition, and the Alsatian boys were being taught how to write a letter—of course in French—to a French boy who had invited them to go and spend their holidays at his home.

From this class we went to several others. The smaller boys and the girls were being taught by nuns, who exercised a firm but gentle sway over their charges and might well be proud of the progress made by their pupils. Outside each schoolroom door was a neat row of the little wooden shoes, that are worn in the streets to keep the feet dry, and their

appearance called up all the old Alsatian stories of Christmas and sabots and fairy storks. Like the children, the stork of Alsace lives his life as though there were no war. As we crossed the line which was once the German frontier a stork flopped overhead in his long-legged heavy flight, carrying materials for his nest, and the sentry who was examining our papers remarked: "That means good luck for your visit to Alsace!"

During the whole time I was in the school I did not hear a word of German, although only a few months ago it was the only language that the children understood. It must be admitted, however, that this statement is too sweeping, because the *Administrateur* from time to time indulged in a most reprehensible habit of prompting small children who were at a loss for an answer; and I am afraid that I must admit to having heard a sly whisper of "*Steuer*," which appeared to come from a certain captain, who was beaming over his children, when a question was being asked as to the nature and meaning of taxes. The Alsatian children are extremely intelligent and quick, and the keenness with which they have set themselves to learn French—the language, literature, and history of their true country—is little short of amazing. History questions were answered with exemplary quickness and exactitude, and the children did not hide their mischievous amusement, in their replies to questions concerning Napoleon, at the presence of an Englishman. They fully appreciated the idea that long ago France and England had been honourable enemies and to-day were close and loyal friends.

There was at least one of the spectators who would



have found it hard to answer all the questions with which these children dealt with quite masterly ease. Louis XVI. was a familiar figure to them, and his corpulence had produced a deep impression on their minds. One small boy considered that it was owing to his fatness that Louis XVI. had to impose so many taxes on his people, and he added that he was a good but weak-willed man who was always of the same opinion as the last man he met. French poems were recited with the utmost spirit, and French geography was one of the children's favourite subjects. The rivers and mountains of their newly recovered country were not merely a subject to be learnt by heart and repeated parrot-like by rote, but something very real, since they were a part of that patrimony of which Alsace had so long unjustly been reft.

Alsations have always been musical, and their churches are famous for their glorious organs. The beneficent French administration has done its best to develop the children's natural talent in this direction, and the masterly way in which the pupils sang part-songs of a distinctly difficult nature was evidence of the soundness of their artistic training.

The French have found that fifteen months' schooling is sufficient to give an Alsatian boy or girl a thorough grounding in the language and literature which was once forbidden. Already one class has finished its education in French, and its place has been taken by younger children. An educational system has been devised, and proved by the test of practice, ready for the day, that cannot now be far distant, when the whole of the annexed provinces will once again be under the rule of France.

One of the best pupils of the school which I visited was a small girl of twelve. She was chosen by the *Administrateur* to present a bouquet of flowers to a certain high personage who was visiting the district. "I knew," said the *Administrateur*, "that she would say something apt and to the point." The high personage, as he accepted the flowers, asked the child whether she was fond of France, and, to his horror, she replied, "No, Sir, I am not fond of France" ("*Non, Monsieur, je n'aime pas la France*"). There was an awkward pause, which the child obviously enjoyed, and then, with a wicked twinkle in her eye, she finished her sentence: "I adore France" ("*Je l'adore*"). She was extremely pleased at having worked out two complicated problems connected with the rule of three, and received the *Administrateur's* congratulations with a due mixture of modesty and self-satisfaction. She was kind enough to give me a message for the English people, which I am happy to transmit. "Please, Monsieur," she said, "tell the English to hurry up and win."

A Christmas Eve spent in an Alsatian village will always remain one of my happiest war recollections. In the greater part of war-stricken Europe that Christmas was but a sad festival. To find a Christmas of true happiness and rejoicing one had to go either to the trenches or to Alsace, at last, after over forty years of suffering, released from the German yoke. The Alsatian felt that he had a right to rejoice and be thankful, which neither the danger of bombardment nor even the loss of his dear ones killed in the noblest of causes could destroy. The enemy could bombard the village at their ease whenever the fancy seized

them, and the inhabitants, with such hospitality as is only to be found in the mountains, proved to us how lightly they held death and danger in comparison with the joy and consolation of once again being French. They bore themselves as men who are the firstfruits of the final victory.

All day long the guns round the Hartmannsweilerkopf had been thundering away remorselessly, but the Alsatians paid no attention to the terrific bombardment. They were concerned with something far more important—the weather. For it was Christmas Eve, and in every house, poor and rich, there was a Christmas tree, which every friend and relation must come and see. If the rain went on, as unhappily it did, many fair Alsatians would not dare to go out in the precious village costumes handed down religiously from mother to daughter for many generations.

For this occasion the General commanding the district had relaxed the severity of martial law. The roads and streets were open to everyone the whole night long, though as a general rule every civilian must be indoors by 8.30 p.m. The General himself was to be present at a Christmas tree party given by the principal inhabitants, and would attend the midnight Mass held in the church, which possesses a great organ that is the pride of all the countryside.

The windows of the little shops were gay with Christmas trees. In the tiny inn where we were staying there was a Christmas tree that reached the roof, decked humbly enough with candles, oranges, and simple toys. I watched this tree being decorated by the landlord and his wife for their only son, who was carefully kept out of the room until it was dark enough

for the candles to be lighted. Friends came in with their little offerings, hung them on the tree, and, after a word or two with the landlord, went out again. Then with evening the grandfather appeared and, climbing with difficulty on a chair, hung his gift, the most precious of all—a model of a “75” gun—on the highest branch. The little boy came in and received present after present with ecstatic joy; but the culminating delight was the “75.” “Oh, it is good to be French!” he said, in a weird mixture of French and the Alsatian *patois*.

We had the honour of being invited to the great Christmas tree of the village at which three generals were present, and, with the trench mud only half scraped from our boots and clothes, we found ourselves in a brilliant assembly in which Christmas and war were strangely mingled.

A huge Christmas tree was ablaze with lights, and round it were gathered soldiers in uniforms of every kind, and girls and children in the beautiful Alsatian costume. No local costume is more picturesque than that of the Alsatian girl: a small embroidered bonnet, with two spreading black silken wings that form a perfect background to the face, richly worked corsage, and bright skirt—red for Roman Catholic, green for Protestant, purple for Jew—half hidden by an apron of many colours.

There were presents for everyone, even for the unexpected foreigner—an engraving of Alsace, stretching out her arms to France, and packets of cigarettes, “Les Diables Bleus,” with a picture on their wrapper of the *chasseur alpin*, whom the Germans call, from his dark-blue uniform, “*der blaue Teufel*.”

The master of the house, who had seen Alsace wrested from the French and who had lived to see his home restored to France, watched the scene with an emotion that words could only profane. "If you knew," he said, "what it means to us to see French uniforms and to hear French spoken freely all round us, you would understand our happiness, despite everything. To have French generals in our house is a joy almost more than we can bear! We are a stubborn, conservative people, and we do not easily forget. When a day or two after the mobilisation we saw the French marching down from the hills, battalion after battalion, the officers with drawn revolvers, ready for any attack—for they were not sure that the Boches had fled—tears of joy ran down our faces. We could not speak, and for a time the crowd was absolutely silent. Then suddenly it broke loose, and really to-day I do not know what we did in the excess of our relief!"

Just before midnight the whole party went out through the rain to the Christmas Mass. If one listened one could hear the distant boom of the guns on the Hartmannsweilerkopf, and remember that men were fighting a mile or two away. The great church was filled to overflowing—women from all the farms and villages round and men in uniforms of every shade of blue. In the front seats were the three generals. One, the commander of the whole district, was a man of a stern, almost fierce expression, which was only qualified by a twinkle in the eye and by a gay smile that became particularly noticeable when he was admiring the marvels of the Christmas tree.

The crowd as they glanced respectfully at these

men, who represented the power of France, the leaders in the great fight of Humanity against the Beast, remembered that on their shoulders lay the burden of the safety of their country. It was on their ceaseless vigilance that depended the security of the iron line which allowed the people behind to rejoice and celebrate Christmas. They had torn the ground on which they stood from German tyranny, and when the moment came would carry forward the colours of France and liberty across the rest of the annexed provinces to Strasburg.

Many a look of admiration was turned to a colonel just behind the generals. Five palms upon the ribbon of his Cross of War showed that five times he had been mentioned in army orders for deeds of heroism, and everyone knew that the capture of the Hartmannsweilerkopf was, under the direction of General Serret, mainly due to his energy, ability, and unflinching courage.

Then, as midnight struck, the sound of the great organ filled the church, and the choir burst into the carol, "*Minuit, Chrétiens! c'est l'heure solennelle.*" It was such a choir as the village had never seen before—men in pale-blue uniforms, most of whom were fresh from the trenches. Among the men mobilised there were many with well-trained voices, and they sang that night as they never before sang in their lives. The soloists were singers whose names are well known to every music lover, and the violinist was the first violin of the Paris Opera.

Never was service more reverent and more impressive. The carol "*Il est né, le divin Enfant,*" expressed all the rejoicing of the soldier who, in the struggle in

a glorious cause, had snatched a moment's respite and proclaimed his confidence in the victory of good over evil. "*Chantons la délivrance*"—the words came again and again, and the voices against the rich background of the organ celebrated cheerfully and gladly the deliverance of Alsace and the whole world from the oppressor.

There followed a scene which called up vividly the ancient days when no man went into battle until he had confessed himself and in face of the enemy had taken the Holy Sacrament. Men with uniforms stained with fresh mud from the trenches, knowing that on the morrow they would be back with death about them on every side, knelt before the high altar and forgot in the religious emotion of the moment all that they had suffered and would have to suffer.

Half an hour later we were gathered, a gay and happy party, around a supper-table. It was the brightest side of war. Stories of the trenches, tales of heroism, were told by men who had seen and taken part in the events of which they spoke. The palm was generally given to a story told by an artillery captain of his lieutenant.

"We had decided," he said, "to get rid of a machine-gun shelter that had been annoying us a great deal, and while we were about it to knock the front line of German trenches to pieces. The lines were so close that the colonel ordered all the front trenches to be evacuated, except for my lieutenant, who had volunteered to stay there and direct the fire. My battery opened fire, and after a few rounds my lieutenant telephoned: 'Very good! But if you shorten your range by twenty yards it will be still better.'

"As the range was over 3,500 yards, I telephoned back to ask him if he was sure that I could shorten

it by so much without danger to him. He answered that it was quite safe. After a number of rounds he telephoned me again to shorten the range, this time by ten yards. 'Then,' he said, 'your shells will be falling right on the front line of German trenches.' 'All right!' I said; 'you, of course, will retire to our second line.' I gave him time to get away, and then began again.

"Ten minutes later, to my amazement, the telephone rang again. My lieutenant had stayed at his post, though a perfect hail of French shells was bursting on the German trenches just seven yards away from him. We measured the distance. It says something for our gunners that only one shell had burst in the French trench."

After this story a toast was drunk to Alsace, to France and the success of the allied arms, and the party broke up.

It was 3.30 on Christmas morning, and the guns up in the mountains were thundering defiance at the Germans, for the battle was still raging on the Hartmannsweilerkopf.

The Hartmannsweilerkopf—Vieil Armand, as the French call it—as one sees it from the valley above Thann, is a bare treeless summit framed between the sky and two lower pine-clad peaks. Its whole story can only be told when the war is finished. What was happening at that Christmas-time can be briefly sketched.

No one ever imagined, either in France or Germany, that a serious advance could be made on either side over the dome of the Vieil Armand. As an observation post it was useful, but in the same region there were many summits that gave almost the same view, and the fight for its possession was in truth a matter of

national pride. From the practical point of view it was to the interest of neither side to hold its top, since the troops who reached the crest were inevitably exposed to a deadly counter-attack and artillery bombardments that nothing could withstand.

On that Christmas Day in 1915 there was, if we had known it, a tragedy hanging over Alsace. There had been a French advance, and prisoners had been taken—prisoners who marched past on Christmas Day before General de Villaret, the Commander of the Army of the Vosges. But, as everyone knew, the French advance was only a *coup de main*. The French infantry pressed forward through an almost impenetrable forest. A great storm was raging, and during the night, in the turmoil of the wind, they did not discover that the enemy, in his turn, was also advancing. An adventurous band of mountain *chasseurs* was surrounded by the Germans while they were digging themselves in. They held out till their last cartridge, and their bugler was heard hurling defiance to the mountain echoes many hours after they were cut off. But eventually ammunition and provisions gave out, and they were compelled to surrender.

It was on the day after Christmas Eve that the French counter-attack regained the greater part of the lost ground, but the fighting of that day and the engagements of the following week were paid for at a heavy price. These combats cost the lives of General Serret and two of his colonels, and the feeling of the inhabitants of the recovered territory in Alsace may be best expressed in the following sentences, which I repeat after a French officer, one of General Serret's most loyal followers: "We shall miss them sorely,

God rest their souls ! They died gallantly, as they had lived, in a glorious struggle."

General Serret had left the impression of his character on the whole of the territory that had been placed under his rule. It was General Serret that Mr. Kipling, in his articles on "France at War," called "the governor of Alsace." "Except for his medals," he wrote, "there was nothing about the governor to show that he was not English. He might have come straight from an Indian frontier command." In appearance he was strangely young. With his heavy moustache and direct, piercing glance, he had a notable resemblance to Lord Kitchener. He always wore the Tam-o'-Shanter of the *chasseur alpin*, and, when the weather was cold, a black sheepskin coat. It was one of his habits to carry a map-case slung from his belt like a sabretache, and on it there was the hunting horn of the *chasseurs alpins*, and the number of the battalion in which he first served, and of which he was inordinately proud. He was the ideal *chasseur à pied*, and embodied all the qualities of that *corps d'élite*, their gaiety and their dash and their imperturbable courage. That Christmas Eve he was talked of as the man who had done most to transplant the French spirit into Alsace and give fresh life and confidence to the Alsatians.

It was a day or two after that an appreciation of his career appeared in the *Journal Officiel*—a quotation from army orders :

"A general of exceptional merit and the highest distinction ; has commanded for more than eleven months a division of picked troops, and has raised their *moral* to the highest possible degree by his

indefatigable activity, his military keenness, his conviction of success, and his elevated sense of patriotism; showed conspicuous bravery and a perfect comprehension of his duties as chief in advancing under an extremely violent artillery fire to the first line of trenches, in order to form a personal opinion as to the situation and to inspire his troops by his presence; was seriously wounded in his right leg, which has been amputated."

As cruel fate would have it, General Serret lost not only his leg, but his life, and the whole French army mourned his loss.

Before the war he was the French Military Attaché in Berlin, and an important report of his concerning the attitude of Germany towards the policy of three years' military service in France, written in March, 1913, is published in the French Yellow Book on the European War. This report is striking for its admirable literary style and a clearness of expression such as is not always characteristic of military reports. It is typical of Lieutenant-Colonel Serret, as he was at that time, that he could quote in an official document Renan's magnificent phrase describing the strength of France as "*son pouvoir éternel de renaissance et de résurrection.*" He had been one of the most brilliant pupils of the Ecole de Guerre, and was a man of very wide general culture. Devoted to his profession, he was, as the French say, "*très chasseur à pied*," that is to say, an admirable representative of the finest troops in France.

On the declaration of war he returned to France and was appointed to the command of a group of *chasseurs à pied*. With them he fought on the Somme and later

on, at the moment of the "race to the sea," in Belgium. In these actions he proved himself a brilliant leader, and was appointed to the command of a brigade in the Vosges and Alsace. Some little time before his death he was placed in command of a division stationed in Alsace, and it was there that he gained his reputation as "*l'homme du Hartmannsweilerkopf*." The summit of this hill was taken, lost, retaken, lost again, and finally retaken. Everyone who knew Serret merely smiled when it was announced that the Germans had gained a trench or two on the slopes of Hartmannsweilerkopf. "It doesn't matter," they would invariably reply; "Serret will capture it again to-morrow!"

During the German counter-attacks he was always anxious to go down into the front trenches on the slopes of the hill, to see for himself how the battle was going on. He was never so happy as when he risked his life. General Serret's most faithful second—that colonel whom I had seen at the Christmas Mass (and looking back, I seem to remember that a shade of foreknowledge rested on his face), and who bore on his Cross of War five palms—told me that many times he had had to pull his chief out of a place of imminent danger by his coat-tails, since all expostulation was useless. It befell that colonel a few days later that he was appointed to a post of honour where death was certain. Some of his friends, who had served under him, were anxious to share that honour, but he refused their pressing requests. "France," he replied, "will have need of you later!" and so he went to his death, alone with the officers and men whom he had been appointed to command—a very perfect gentleman.

On the last occasion that General Serret went

forward towards the enemy's lines the Germans opened a very violent *feu de barrage*, but the General was not to be stopped by so trifling a thing as German shells. "*Tant pis !*" he said to his officers, who urged him to wait until the bombardment had died down ; " I am going on ! " He went forward, and a shell, bursting on the parapet of a trench near him, wounded him in three places. One of his wounds cost him a leg, while a second eventually led to his death.

It is in Alsace that General Serret will be best remembered. He was, in unofficial fashion, as Mr. Kipling realised, the governor of that country which the French have, after forty years, recovered from German tyranny. The Alsatians loved him, and his wise and kindly rule came with a divine relief after the petty vexations and merciless domineering of German military rule.

His experience in Berlin had taught him to know the Germans well, and in his knowledge he was absolutely confident of final victory. " There is only one thing to do with them," he would say : " to hold them in and choke them down until they have learnt their lesson—that they are powerless against us ! "

He had studied the question of artillery preparation very closely, and even before the war he had in this matter ideas which have been proved by experience to be correct. The expression " an artillery preparation *à la Serret* " became a familiar one in the French army, as meaning the methodical utilisation of very powerful artillery to prepare the way for the infantry. It was General Serret's theory that infantry should be able to come to hand-grips with the enemy without firing a shot.

Officer of the Legion of Honour, he was promoted

during the war to colonel and brigadier-general, and received the Croix de Guerre with two palms, denoting two mentions in army orders. Just before his death he was promoted Commander of the Legion of Honour; and a third palm was added to the ribbon of the Croix de Guerre which was laid upon his coffin, as a commemoration of his third and last mention in army orders, which has been quoted above. He was buried, as he would have wished, in a cemetery of Alsace, and there the other day I saw his grave with the flag of France flying above it; on either side of him lie the two colonels who had shared his exploits and his renown, and who even in death were not divided.

It so happened that I saw with my own eyes something of what the Hartmannsweilerkopf had cost Germany. The French, in their official *communiqués*, claimed to have taken 1,200 prisoners, while the Germans on their side declared that their *total losses* did not exceed 1,100. That Christmas Day the prisoners taken at the Hartmannsweilerkopf marched past before the General commanding the Army of the Vosges at his headquarters. I counted them, and there were twenty-one officers and 1,360 non-commissioned officers and rank and file, all unwounded. Presumably the Germans did not wish Europe to believe that nearly 1,400 men, including a considerable number of picked troops—*Jaegers*, or *chasseurs*, as the French call them—surrendered without putting up a fight and without suffering a large number of casualties; consequently we may conclude that the German casualties in the Hartmannsweilerkopf affair exceeded the official estimate of 1,100 by at least three or four times that number.

It is always a delicate matter, especially for a non-combatant, to write about the bearing and attitude of prisoners of war, and it is unquestionable that anyone who has any sporting instinct feels a certain indulgence for a conquered foe, even though, when the tables were reversed, he has proved himself as unchivalrous and cruel as the German. Yet credit cannot be given to the prisoner who bears himself bravely in the most trying ordeal that a soldier can have to face unless his conduct is contrasted with that of men who have less courage and self-control. Speaking generally, the prisoners who marched past the French general on Christmas Day were not soldierly in their appearance or behaviour, nor did they seem to be in any way adequate representatives of a militarist Power that, when all is said and done, has had the audacity to declare war against the civilised world.

There were exceptions. There was a captain of *Jaeger* who led the melancholy procession. He marched and saluted the French general like a soldier, and everyone in the crowd approved his attitude. When the prisoners were brought back to the rear a French officer, with a certain irony, expressed his great satisfaction that so large a proportion of officers to rank and file had been captured. "On other occasions," he said, "when we have captured prisoners, there were remarkably few officers, and when we questioned the men on the matter, they said that their officers always kept well in the rear, out of immediate danger." "*Wir sind Jaeger!*" said the German captain, and the pride of his reply at least proved that he was an enemy worthy of a Frenchman's steel.

It must be said, however, that this captain's attitude

was exceptional. There were a certain number of non-commissioned officers and men who held themselves in soldierly fashion, but as a general rule the men did not march as if they had been drilled. I have seen French regiments come in dead beat after hours and hours of forced marching, but none the less in their very fatigue there was always the consciousness of discipline and a certain swinging gait that proved the acquired instinct of always marching in step. The Germans were undoubtedly tired. They had marched over thirty miles on the two preceding days. They had had a bad time of it in the trenches, and in addition they had suffered the inevitable depression of surrendering to an enemy. English and French prisoners have marched past before German generals in the midst of hostile crowds, and even their enemies have confessed that they bore themselves bravely and like men, remembering always that they were upholding the honour of their respective nations. The German prisoners were strangely apathetic, and their only idea, with a few exceptions, of showing to the enemy how soldierly a German could be, even in the moment of defeat, was to march past in as slovenly fashion as they dared. The famous *Paraden-marsch* (goose-step) is no longer an essential part of the German soldier's training. Half a dozen men broke into it as they passed the General, but the rest did not, simply because they had never learnt it. A few men tried to show their hostility to the enemy who had made them prisoners by slouching past out of step, with their hands in their pockets, and they were promptly called to order. The French argued, in a way which I think would be accepted by the British soldier, that

no Frenchman taken prisoner would run the risk of dishonouring his army by marching badly while hostile eyes were fixed upon him.

Orders were given by a French officer in a vigorous German, which showed that he had a close acquaintance with the ways of the army across the Rhine ; indeed, that he had made a special study of them. The prisoners themselves showed their surprise at his knowledge of German discipline by the involuntary start with which they received the stentorian order "*Links!*" (" Eyes left ! ") as they reached the saluting point.

From the point of view of physique, the prisoners were curiously mixed. There were some well-built non-commissioned officers who, if their expressions were displeasing, were none the less able-bodied and well-trained soldiers. Quite a considerable proportion were mere boys, whose faces showed that the hardships of the trenches had seriously affected them. Several of them wore spectacles—studious-looking youths who obviously would have been more at home poring over their books. There were in this batch half a dozen or a dozen prisoners whose physique would have barred them from service either in France or in England. Stunted and misshapen as they were, their faces were those of men of rudimentary intelligence. At the first glance one classed them as irresponsible and half developed, and one realised at once the consequences of the then-recent German medical examination of men classed as permanently defective and unfitted for service. It must be remembered that all these men were taken in the first German lines. It is certain that one would search in vain

along the French and English lines from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier to find a single soldier so obviously unfitted for his duty. It was instructive to compare such unfortunate specimens of humanity with the French escort which guarded them: first a body of gendarmes, finely mounted and evidently determined to prove to the Germans and the crowd how admirable was their discipline and training; then the French infantry, *poilus*, who marched as befitted veterans of a hundred fights. As they turned towards the General in the salute there was a certain easy confidence in their movements that has always marked troops convinced of victory.

An officer summed up the whole affair. "I am delighted to see," he said, "that the German officers have their men so little in hand as to allow them to become as slovenly as these prisoners. Any soldier can see that the majority of them are doing their best and can march no better simply because they have never been taught. It would be impossible for a French or an English soldier to march so badly, because they have been properly drilled. The German army has changed indeed!"

The appearance of the Hartmannsweilerkopf prisoners who marched past General de Villaret on Christmas Day, 1915, was undoubtedly encouraging to the Allies. No doubt the Germans were not sending their best troops to such points as the Hartmannsweilerkopf, the loss or conquest of which could not make any real difference as to the issue of the war. To such points they sent a large proportion of inferior soldiers, who were by no means capable of gracing a triumphal procession. It was, however, a confession

of weakness, which presaged surely the final victory of the Allies, that they were compelled to send such miserable specimens of humanity into their front lines at all.

A word should be said as to the attitude of the French crowd before whom the prisoners passed. Without exaggeration it may be said that everyone there had a friend or relation who had suffered at German hands, yet all emotion was stoically repressed, and the prisoners went by amid complete silence. There was perhaps a murmur when a prisoner seemed to wish to insult the General by his slovenliness, but it lasted scarcely a second, and the crowd resumed that silence which told of iron self-control and the unwavering certainty of victory.

Though the shadow of the Hartmannsweilerkopf and the continual fighting on its slopes lies heavy over all Alsace, the countryside is admirably cultivated, in defiance of the German shells within the range of which it lies. The fields are not large, and patches of wheat alternate with root crops. In a strange medley of peace and war, hens and chickens roost on the parapets of trenches which are half hidden among the turnips, and broad and complicated wire entanglements lie entirely smothered by the waving corn and rye.

The masking of a road has become a science, and after a certain experience of the front one becomes an expert in appreciating the efficacy of the screens erected by the French to hide traffic from the enemy. Nowhere on the front are roads more generally and more thoroughly masked than in Alsace. In a mountainous country there are many points of outlook, and the Germans can command from points of vantage tracts of ground

lying many miles behind the front trenches. The sausage balloon, too, has complicated circulation in the rear, and the motorist watches with considerable interest the rising and falling of these observation stations in mid-air, for it is seldom that the masked road is really screened from the sausage balloon. One motors for miles and miles along artificial hedges made of brushwood or canvas ; sometimes both sides of the road are screened, owing to the view from a distant summit held by the enemy, and then one has the uneasy idea that the Germans must be everywhere.

There are often gaps in these screens, and the view through them is enhanced by a sense of adventure. From a precipitous road one may look out on the chimneys and factories of Mühlhausen, and see in the valley below one's feet the grey houses and the cathedral, with its tiled roof of many colours, of continually bombarded Thann. Both on the French and German sides factories are still working, and men and women are going to their daily labour as they did in time of peace.

Thann has suffered very considerably from German bombardment, particularly its factories. Old Thann has been practically swept out of existence, and yet among the ruins, only 800 yards from the hated German, its inhabitants continue to live the common round of their lives. The cathedral has not been seriously injured, though it has often been shelled. The glass was removed from its windows by the French, packed up in cases, and sent to a place of security.

By a lucky chance it is the hideous modern statues erected on Thann Cathedral by the German invader that have suffered the most from the German shells,

The most serious damage was caused by a shell which exploded inside the great organ and wrecked it completely. Unfortunately the damage did not stop there, and further destruction was caused by heavy fragments of the organ falling on the fine pediment above the porch. The façade was well protected from the outside, but the blows from within caused considerable injury to the pediment, though there is every hope that it can be restored.

Thann, despite its proximity to the enemy, is very gay and bright. As a rule towns near the lines are depressed and melancholy in inverse proportion to the damage they have received from the enemy, and the most dismal place that I have ever visited is a certain fortress town many miles behind the lines, which has only to complain of occasional aerial raids.

In an adjoining valley I had the pleasure of lunching in a German forester's house, where some French infantry officers were quartered. At the declaration of war the forester retired hastily to his native country, though he seems to have contemplated resistance, since the French found loopholes, both for rifles and a machine-gun, cut in his garage wall. These loopholes covered ground of strategic importance, but they were never used. The French, as befitted *chasseurs alpins*, came into Alsace not by the valleys, but by the summits of the mountains, where no ordinary troops could have passed. The German, in his flight, left behind him an autograph album, which, instead of being a dull and trivial record of casual visitors, has become since the war a document of real value and interest. Its first pages are filled with the usual trite compliments and banalities, all in German. Then came the declaration of war, and

a German *Jaeger* officer wasted two whole pages in boastful predictions. "We shall soon," he announced, "wring the neck of the Gallic cock." He would no doubt have been amazed and horrified to have guessed that the next page was to be used by an officer of the French Alpine *chasseurs*, who twitted him a little unkindly as to the inaccuracy of his prophecy, and expressed the gentle hope that they might yet meet on the field of battle. Since then some of the most famous men in France have signed their names in that autograph book, and its pages have been illustrated by the pens of several well-known artists.

In this valley the military authorities have organised a most excellent officers' and soldiers' club. The officers' club-room is hung with a number of paintings and drawings signed by famous artists which would delight a connoisseur's heart. The ubiquitous Georges Scott is responsible for a *poilu*, which is probably the best work he has ever done. The cubist school, which has no sympathy with M. Scott, is equally well represented, and there are quite a number of paintings which need a title if the spectator is to decide what they represent. In the men's club the principal room is arranged as a theatre, and it was there that the Comédie Française gave one of its most successful representations at the front. All the work has been done by the men themselves. The back scene represents a trench, with sandbags, parapets, and sentry's post. For such an audience realism is a necessity, since the *poilu* who has lived for months in a trench would be quick to spot the smallest inaccuracy. The men who painted it were professional scene painters turned by fate and German ambition into soldiers;

consequently there is not a detail in it which is not perfectly true to life.

The walls are decorated with a number of frescoes, all inspired by the war. On one of them a fair Alsatian is flying up to heaven in the arms of a stalwart *chasseur alpin*. Another and less symbolistic painting represents a mule convoy on a mountain path. It is the work of a muleteer, and his realism is so vivid that it might be attributed to bad drawing. The second muleteer, who is following immediately behind the heels of the first mule, has his face foreshortened in a way that suggests some new and curious form of toothache. As a matter of fact, the artist's drawing is perfectly right, I was assured, and accurately represents the contortions to which a wise muleteer submits in order to guarantee himself against an all too possible kick in the face.

But the crowning decoration of the theatre consists of the boxes. They are not real boxes; they are simply painted on a projection of the wall, but they are most lifelike, and at night might easily deceive. From the two boxes two important personages of Europe in gallant company watch unfailingly the dramatic representations of the *poilus* in Alsace. One of them is the Emperor of Austria, who, according to the artists, has reached the final stage of weariness. The other is the German Crown Prince, who, with an idiotic smile on his face, is puffing hard at a big cigar, and who, to prove his originality, has swung a pair of long and skinny legs over the side of the box.



CHAPTER II

THE VOSGES

IN time of war Gerardmer is a town of hospitals and closed hotels. Despite the beauty of its lake, no one would wish to stop there a minute longer than necessary, and so when I passed there in June, 1916, with a French officer, we agreed to halt just long enough to lay in a stock of provisions for lunch and then to press on to the Col de la Schlucht. Our halt was longer than we intended, as our chauffeur tried to take a short cut, in defiance of the warning of a sergeant, who hailed us from a window and assured us with many gesticulations that we should never get through. The chauffeur persisted, and a few seconds later the car was up to the axles in mire, and every effort to extricate it only sent the wheels in deeper. It took several planks and two horses to release it from the slough.

The provisions we bought in Gerardmer were excellent, and we ate them on the hillside just above Le Collet, where the railway to the Hohnneck joins the main road. At this point there were rows of brushwood screens, apparently masking the line, and we consequently supposed, not knowing the country, that on the other side of these screens, where we lunched, we must be in full view of the enemy. There was a certain satisfaction in the thought that a look-out man with a telescope might be watching our meal, and we waved tin cups fiercely in the direction in which we imagined he might be as we drank to his ill-luck. Unhappily

our bravado was utterly wasted, as that particular point of the road was not overlooked by the enemy, and the screens, which we thought had been constructed for purposes of concealment, were simply intended to keep the snow from drifting down on the road and railway line.

A little train took us up to the Hohneck, about 5,000 feet above sea level, once a famous point of view. To-day its hotel lies in ruins, and its slopes, where the white mountain anemone blooms in profusion, are scarred with French trenches. As is usual with these famous points of view, an impenetrable mist was over everything. All that one could perceive were dim grey figures, working hard at strengthening their shelters and trenches.

In one of the French shelters we found a sergeant who, on the rare occasions when the weather was fine, spent his time in "spotting" the positions of the enemy's guns and *Minenwerfer* (mine-throwers). He was by profession, in civilian life, a commercial traveller, but maps had always had a fascination for him, and when war broke out, after a week's training in reading plans and taking signals, he was sent up to the Hohneck, where he found a job that suited him perfectly. The maps he drew of the German lines were models of what such maps should be, and he admitted that travelling would be very dull after his present work.

In many places the mountain sides were torn with shell-holes, but bombardments seemed to have had no effect upon the game. The *coq de bruyère* was fairly common, and though *la chasse* was strictly forbidden, I tripped up, while wandering in the mist, with my boot caught in a hare snare. It is to be feared that that running wire had been set there in defiance of

regulations by some *poilu* who regarded poaching in time of war as a legitimate amusement.

In the mountains of the Vosges the *voies aériennes* (aerial railways) have rendered the greatest service in supplying the troops. Steel cables, carried on high standards twenty or thirty feet above the ground, plunge up and down the steep hillsides, and along them travel little suspended trucks loaded with all that the army requires. Since the war began this system has taken a great extension, and nearly everywhere one could see these trucks either sliding down, or creeping up in apparent defiance of the laws of gravity.

One of the main stations of these aerial railways was cut thirty feet deep in solid rock, so that it could defy the largest shells, and all day and all night long there was a continual arrival of loaded trucks. At this station they were shunted on to other wires, but on these wires traffic was only possible at night, for from that station onwards they were in full view of the enemy, and the German gunners found it an attractive amusement to shell the trucks as they passed slowly on their way.

The scene in the underground station was a curious one. Electric lights gleamed redly through the thick smoke from the engine-room, and all day long men in stained uniforms were toiling round the toy trucks that seemed to wander in of their own accord. Some of their contents were unloaded immediately and distributed to the troops in the neighbourhood of the station. Other trucks were shunted to wait for the moment when darkness would allow them to be sent on towards the advanced lines.

One of the weirdest sights that I have seen during the

war is that to be seen from the end of a station facing the Germans. One stumbles along in the darkness through a low tunnel cut in the living rock. Then the ground slopes away suddenly, and the tunnel comes to an end with a great wooden door. In this door two square loopholes are cut, and through them pass the cables that plunge straight down the hillside to the French lines. The day I saw them the cables vanished, 100 yards or so below the tunnel, in a dense lake of mist, cut off as abruptly and completely as if they had plunged into water. The sensation of that journey through the rough, dark tunnel and the mysterious view to which it brought us—two parallel lines diving into a grey sea—reminded me of an experience many years old near Naples. By chance near Cumae we came on the ruins of a great tunnel that a Roman emperor had built to enable his troops to march down swiftly and unseen to the Portus Romanus. That tunnel grew lower and lower as we advanced, and ended in a tiny hole, through which we squeezed our way, to find ourselves blinking and amazed on the melancholy shore of grey Lake Avernus. The mystery of legend which shrouds the dark entry to the Infernal Regions had its counterpart in the tunnel of the Vosges, for somewhere, swallowed up in the impenetrable lake of mist, were hidden the German barbarians, who were seeking to turn Europe and the world into a German hell.

Never does war seem more incongruous than when it is waged in places where magnificent scenery has attracted the tourist and where modern hotels have risen for his comfort. The coast of Belgium between Coxyde and Nieuport Rains, with its ruined summer villas, is a miserable spectacle. The bombardment has

laid bare the nakedness of the jerry-builder's craft, and the villas stand there exposing the cheat of walls one brick thick, inviting derision and contempt. Scarcely more attractive in their destruction are the tourist hotels of the Vosges. The modern building simply collapses before a shell. Sometimes it is so flimsy that shells pierce its outer walls without exploding and merely wreck the interior, leaving the unlovely husk more or less intact. Our ancestors in the days of bows and arrows built with a solidity that still defies high explosives. There is a castle on a Lorraine hill which the Germans have liberally bombarded. Where its walls are thinnest they have opened a few breaches, one of which, when observed from a certain spot, provides an ideal frame for an uninjured statue of Jeanne d'Arc, who gazes out unconquered towards the foe. But the largest German shells have so far proved incapable of breaking through its walls where they are thickest.

On the Col de la Schlucht, above Gerardmer, there were once two hotels, divided by the frontier line between France and Alsace. Both of them, to judge from what is left of their signs, claimed to be French houses; both have suffered the same fate, and are no more than heaps of untempting ruins, a blot on one of the loveliest landscapes in France. About a mile further into what was once Germany and now is France there was a German hotel. For many months the enemy spared it. Then one day the temptation of bombarding it proved too great for the German gunners, for it stood boldly forward on the crest of a hill, facing squarely and unscreened the German lines. "They must have enjoyed shelling it," said a French artilleryman in an almost envious tone. "It is an ideal target,

and they could watch the effect of every shell they fired, a bit of luck that does not happen to us often in these modern days of indirect fire." Certainly the German artillery did its work thoroughly. The hotel walls, which consisted of white-painted metal tiles on a brick foundation, provided splendid bursting material for the projectiles. The whole of the hotel front was torn out and the furniture in the rooms shattered to matchwood, while its back premises alone retained a ghostly resemblance to their ancient form. To annoy the Germans, some French soldier collected six of the large gilt letters which advertised the hotel and its good cheer. He was fortunate enough to find just the six letters he needed, and he fixed them to the railing of a circular terrace facing the enemy, who the next day saw staring him in the face the word FRANCE from an hotel that once was German. The Germans tried to retaliate by running up above their positions a flag in honour of their so-called "victory" off Jutland, but the retort lost its savour as soon as the truth concerning the naval battle was published, and the French did not even trouble to shell the flag.

The road down to the hotel is cut in the face of a precipitous rock, and, as it is in full view of the German positions, it is heavily masked. Earlier in the war the enemy attempted to destroy this road by bombardment, and bombarded all the cliffs immediately above it with heavy shells, including a number of 420's. The explosions brought down a quantity of rock. A commissariat waggon with four horses, which was passing, was completely buried, but the four men who accompanied it escaped uninjured. Near them the road passed through a small tunnel cut in the rock, and

there they lay in a gutter for several hours until the bombardment had spent itself. The Germans expended a large amount of explosives on those rocks, and yet one can hardly see their effects to-day. The bombardment of a mountain is an unprofitable job.

War in the mountains has exigencies of its own, and raises special problems both of offence and defence, and of transport. Tourist railways have been pressed into the service of the army, and, as we have said, aerial railways are largely used. The mule is invaluable, and in the winter mules were supplemented by dog-drawn sleighs. Four hundred and fifty trained dogs from Alaska, North-Western Canada, and Labrador were brought over by a French lieutenant who had spent fourteen years in Alaska. At the first news of war he hastened to France to take his place in the army, and it was only after spending a year in the trenches that he left to bring back the dogs which in the past had proved so useful to him, and of which he knew every trick and habit. It was no small feat to transport from the American continent all these dogs and lose on the journey only three. Two of them developed mange and had to be destroyed, while one of them, of a too inquisitive turn of mind, tried to investigate a hatchway while he was tied up, and was strangled before anybody realised what had happened.

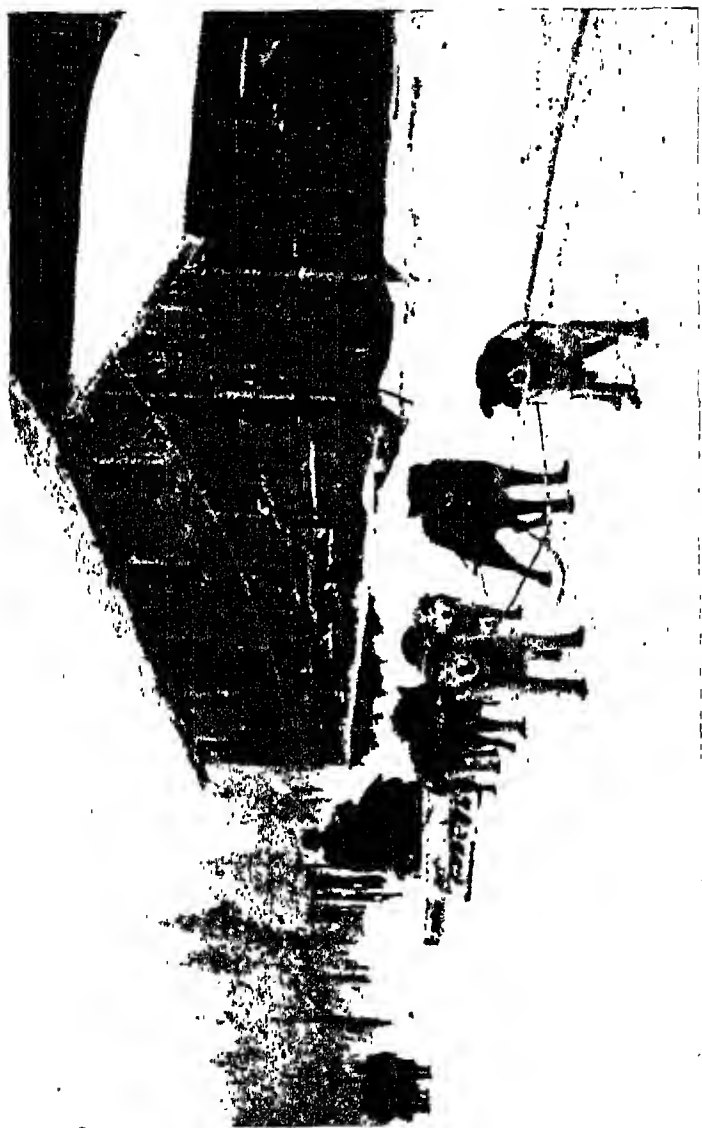
From the beginning of the year 1916 to April 21st, with a short interval, the snow in the neighbourhood of the Schlucht Pass was deep enough for the dogs to be able to render yeoman service. They were able to draw heavy loads over almost inaccessible country and to supplement to a valuable extent the mule transport, which would otherwise have been the sole means

of revictualling the troops in the Vosges. But with the end of the snow their utility did not cease. They were then harnessed to the two-foot gauge light railways which now run everywhere behind the front, and were found capable of drawing the heaviest load up the steepest gradient. Eleven dogs with a couple of men can carry a ton up some of the most precipitous slopes in the mountains, and I was assured that two teams of seven dogs each could do the work of five horses in this difficult country, with a very great economy of men.

The kennels which I visited lay just below the crest of a certain mountain. One has always had the idea that these dogs were of a very ferocious disposition, from stories of snow-bound countries, but in point of fact this belief proved entirely croneous. It would be hard to conceive more amiable creatures than the 250 dogs who welcomed our visit. Of them all there was only one who was passed by with the warning, "He bites!" They were far less amiable to one another than to their masters, and fights had to be sternly suppressed, but they made no concealment of their delight at being caressed by the casual visitor. The leaders of the teams were perhaps rather supercilious, and had to be hauled out of their kennel to be patted, but the ordinary rank and file complained loudly and bitterly if they were passed over without a word of greeting.

The dogs were 447 strong when they reached France, but their number was soon considerably increased, and there was a plentiful supply of pups of all ages and sizes, which played about happily on the mountain slopes, well within reach of the German guns, as though such a thing as war had never existed.

Three breeds were in service—the Alaskan, the



ALASKAN DOGS IN THE VOSGES.

Labrador, and the Canadian, and the best of these is the Alaskan, as his courage never fails, and he will work until he drops, though he is perhaps the weakest of them. They were all shaggy dogs, with pointed ears and bushy tails, their colour ranging from black to white, between greys and browns. Their chest development, so necessary for hauling, was remarkable. Their keep cost the State but little. They were mainly fed on rice, horseflesh (of which there was abundance), and waste military biscuits, and this fare appeared to suit them admirably, as they were always in splendid condition, and disease was practically unknown.

The harness consisted of a chest strap and a wooden bar behind, which took the place of a horse's kicking strap. It was extremely simple, and could be put on or taken off in a minute. Seven excited dogs, however, at the moment of harnessing, need all four men's strength and superintendence to prevent them from getting into an inextricable tangle. No whip was used, and order was simply maintained by commands shouted in English. As all the men in charge were Frenchmen—most of them had had no experience at all of dogs before the war—these commands had become considerably corrupted and were quite unintelligible to an Englishman, though perfectly clear to the dogs for whom they were intended.

Once the dogs understood there was business afoot, they quieted down and allowed themselves to be led to the truck. Here again there was a striking difference between the leader and his followers. The leader, whose name was Kowak—so called after an Alaskan river—regarded the idea of being guided by a man as an indignity and an insult to his superior independence,

so he walked with head low and tail between his legs, looking as miserable as he could manage. The other six dogs, however, had no such haughty notions, and they trotted peacefully along under human direction.

As soon as they were hitched to the truck the whole team gave tongue and began to pull with obvious delight. The passengers were not yet on board, as there was a point on the line where trucks were nearly always derailed and had to be hoisted back again. However, on this occasion the dangerous place was passed safely, and the dogs dashed on, apparently bent on leaving us behind. The truck was provided with an effective brake of a most elementary nature, working like a railway signal lever, and the team was brought up short to the order. The dogs squatted down placidly on their haunches and waited events, under the watchful eye of their leader, who was now in his element.

After we had fitted ourselves in as best we could the French officer took command of the team, and releasing the brake, started us off with a hissing sound and a shout of "All right!" which produced an instant effect on the dogs. They soon got up speed, and in a few minutes we were jolting along over the rails with seven bushy tails waving vigorously in front of us. The dogs obviously enjoyed pulling tremendously, as the wagging of their tails proved, and they threw all their strength into the task, especially at the moment when we were passing a motor-car that had great difficulty in making any headway at all in the muddy, stony road that ran alongside the light railway track.

The experiment of transporting these dogs to France showed that they could be of real service in mountainous country, and represented a real economy. In such

districts the mule must be the main stand-by, and all the officers I met in the Vosges were enthusiastic as to the services these animals had rendered, provided that they were in charge of muleteers that thoroughly understood their business. The mule, however, is not an easy animal to control, and it proved far easier to teach inexperienced men how to manage a team of dogs. The work done by the dogs brought from the far North has been very considerable, and their success on the light railway lines, which was not anticipated, more than doubled their value.

In the mountains of the Vosges men still fight to-day in the open with the cold steel as they fought in the days before machines of scientific destruction drove them underground. These mountains are the country of the bayonet and the machine-gun. Among their precipitous pine-clad hills there is a break in the continuity of the great line of trenches that runs from the North Sea to Switzerland. The obstacles set by nature in the way of the barbarous invader from the East are proof against the puny artillery of science. A sixteen-inch shell makes no more impression on a mountain than a raindrop on a paving stone, and under cover of the forests and the rocks whole armies can lie hidden in perfect security from the enemy's guns. The aviator's eye cannot pierce the dense canopy of ever-green foliage, and the guns, as a rule, can only fire at random, blindly wasting their shells among the trees and boulders. The rifle has its part to play in the fighting, but it is handicapped by the abundance of cover, and it is with the bayonet and the machine-gun that the issue rests. It is only in the valley that the guns are dangerous.

When I drove in January, 1916, from St. Dié up to the mountains, our road lay exposed for half a mile to the view and shells of the Germans, just 1,000 yards away, and the cars worked up to full speed to get past the danger zone as quickly as possible. The enemy maintained a prudent silence, being well aware that the French in this section had definite orders to reply to every German projectile by four shells of the same calibre, aimed unerringly at his most vulnerable points—his dépôts and cantonments in the rear. So, as a rule, even under considerable provocation, the enemy remained discreetly quiet. In less than a minute our automobiles had disappeared from view in a narrow wooded ravine, and the German's opportunity was lost.

European wars seemed as far away and impossible among the steep hills of the Vosges as in an old-time fairy tale. The precipitous forests were apparently as lonely and deserted as ever, where a man jaded and careworn with city life and civilisation could rest his mind and tire his body healthily with exercise and bracing air. Zigzag paths straggled dizzily up the headlong hillside between the ordered pine trunks, which stood out boldly black against the sky above and near the ground were pale green with fresh moss crisped with frost, and past great overhanging boulders chequered with the rays of a January sun.

Sometimes one might catch a glimpse of a pale blue uniform, but an instant later it had faded away into the all-pervading green, and the mountain seemed as lonely and as peaceful as if there was no war.

Yet if one looked more closely, one could see that human ingenuity had been hard at work doing its utmost to reinforce the obstacles that nature had set against

the German. Trenches were hard to dig in the rocky mountain side, and often they were only a few yards long—*tranchées de tir*, mere rifle pits. Blockhouses of stout pine trunks, with deep loopholes, were dotted all about the woods. Sometimes a great boulder had been pressed into service, and, topped with a breastwork of tree trunks, it made an almost impregnable shelter. These rustic trenches and shelters were as much a part of the forest as a woodman's hut, and the *poilus* who built them had adorned their work with soft beds of bright green moss.

The main defence was the barbed wire which was twined in an inextricable network round tree trunks, fallen branches, and wooden stakes. It ran along the hill slopes and down into the ravines, extending in all directions its impassable barrier. On the other side of the barbed wire it was debatable ground. The French sentries lay hidden in shallow holes, with their rifles at their shoulders, listening intently for a stir or a rustle that might betray the approach of a German patrol. Sometimes a French patrol would make its way through a narrow zigzag passage in the barbed wire entanglement and cautiously glide down the hill towards the enemy. Perhaps it would reach the German line of wire unnoticed and watch there for a while, to see what the Germans were doing and, if occasion served, to risk a shot or two at any of the enemy who might show themselves. The most propitious moment was when the German sentries were being relieved. Everything was silent, and not a leaf was stirring. One German, glad that his duty was over, would leave his shelter and turn back towards the rear; the other, who was taking his place, would

show himself incautiously for a moment. Then there would be a little movement behind a rock on the hill-side, the silence would be cut by two rifle cracks that echoed through the valley, and there would be two Germans less in the world. "But they are getting very cautious," said a sergeant, a short, thick-set man with a black moustache and a merry eye. "I crawled out this morning as far as their wire and followed it along 300 or 400 yards without seeing a single Boche!"

Sometimes patrol knocked up against patrol in the debatable ground, and then there would be speedy work with the bayonet. On such occasions the Boche, as a rule, scuttled back to the shelter of his wire as quickly as he could. Two French soldiers were out together, engaged in the congenial task of hunting the German on the mountain side. Suddenly one of them exclaimed as he peered into a hole between two rocks: "Hallo! there is a Boche!" A melancholy figure, holding its arms above its head, appeared above the boulders, and a plaintive voice replied in perfect French: "Yes, gentlemen! It is a Boche!" "And what is a Boche doing there?" asked the Frenchman fiercely. "The Boche," came the sad reply, "is doing what he can—he surrenders!" The humorous way in which the prisoner accepted the name of "Boche," which generally makes the Germans furious—probably because neither they nor the French, nor anyone else, know the origin of the word—appealed to his captors, and when they brought him back to their lines they shared their soup with him before he was sent to the rear.

The Frenchmen engaged in the particular section where this incident occurred were not, as might be

expected, young men to whom mountaineering and war in the hills might be an agreeable sport. They were Territorials, men over forty, and for the most part fathers of a family. Moreover, many of them came from Marseilles, and until the war had had practically no experience of mountains. A few of them, however, were Corsicans, and they were in their element on the precipitous hillsides stalking a German.

The major who conducted us over his domain—which, as he rightly said, was to be measured rather by height and depth than by length and breadth—was a man of seventy, and in civilian life a lawyer at Marseilles. Yet he climbed up the break-neck paths, never pausing for breath, with an ease that many men half his age might have envied. A rigid disciplinarian, he treated his men in that paternal fashion which has always appealed to the Frenchman's heart. In time of war, as in time of peace, he insisted that it was essential that all the outward forms and symbols of discipline should be strictly observed. "The men," he said, "who salute smartly and hold themselves in a soldier-like fashion are invariably the men who are best disciplined under fire." In the past there was an idea that sometimes the regiments of Southern France were rather lax in discipline. To-day this idea has been entirely dispelled, and the men of the Midi are as sternly disciplined and as finely trained as the famous "Iron Division" of the 20th Army Corps, which in time of peace was the ever-watchful guard of the eastern frontier of France.

The major told me that it was extraordinary how quickly his men had adapted themselves to geographical conditions to which they were totally unaccustomed.

They had gone to the district in which they were fighting in the autumn of 1914, and in a month or two there was not a single mountain path or mule track in their sector of which they did not know every bend and turn. "I myself," he said, "knew the country a little, as I used to spend my summer holidays in the Vosges, but I had never looked on those excursions from a military point of view. Like most of my men, I had never supposed that I should ever be a soldier again."

These Territorial troops were particularly quick in discovering how to make themselves as secure and comfortable as possible on the mountain side. Their officers explained to them what to do and what not to do, and kept a sharp look-out on them when they were building their trenches and shelters, and the result was that they found themselves most comfortably installed and extremely well protected from German bullets. In fact, they were as comfortable in the front lines up in the hills as they had been in their cantonments in the valley. They spent three weeks face to face with the enemy, and were often quite reluctant to go back to the rear, where they would rest for a fortnight before returning to their posts.

In their spare time the men had full scope for their ingenuity in adorning and improving their temporary homes. It is characteristic of them that they settled down to their military life in the mountains as if it were to be permanent and not a mere parenthesis. They built their major a palatial residence and provided it with a work of art in the shape of a barbed wire chandelier, which was not merely ingenious, but actually beautiful. There were artists, architects, builders, cabinet-makers among them, and each of them

contributed his share of special knowledge to the general result. Their great triumph was the Turkish baths, complete with dome and crescent above the roof, where every man could wash himself to his heart's content. "I do not say," said the major, "that we shall not be glad to go back home when peace is declared ; but we can hang on here quite comfortably for as long as may be, and you will not hear a word of grumbling until we have finished our work and beaten the Boches once and for all."

For months the French in the Vosges slowly but steadily advanced. This advance was not apparent on the ordinary small scale map, but on the ground itself one could appreciate its importance and reality. In mountainous country, with hills as steep as the side of a house, swift progress is naturally impossible, but the French steadily nibbled away at the German positions and extended their hold on the debatable ground between the lines. In mountains there is little night fighting. The ground is so difficult that in the darkness a man who attempts to leave the beaten track has every chance of breaking his neck by falling over a rock or dashing his head against a pine trunk. The Germans tried one or two night attacks near St. Dié, hoping to break through the barbed wire protection by sheer weight of numbers, but these experiments proved very costly to the enemy and produced no results worth mentioning. The French, on the other hand, would drive back the German patrols in the daylight, and, after gaining a few hundred yards, set to work to protect their new advance with barbed wire entanglements. Last November (1915) in one section, for instance, they advanced 600 yards without a

casualty. Then at nightfall two battalions set to work to establish entanglements round their positions and kept hard at it all night, covered by a company which maintained a steady fire on the German line. The Germans replied with their rifles and wounded a few men, but the work went on, and the next morning another piece of ground had been definitely reclaimed from the pollution of the invader.

The French at that time held the slopes and the summit of a hill that runs up to an altitude of about 2,500 feet. They had extended their positions as far as a small *col* which runs from this hill to another summit about 100 feet higher. This second summit was then still in German hands. From that point the lines descended abruptly into a ravine, and in this ravine the French had the upper hand, for they had occupied a mound about half-way down it, which formed a commanding position. Then the barbed wire entanglements again ascended the steep hillside and traced out a semicircular front, which at the highest point was in close contact with the enemy. The result of this complicated situation was that frequently French and Germans were face to face with only a few hundred yards of air between them, though before they could come to a hand-to-hand tussle they would have to climb a long way down into the ravine below and up again on the other side.

Sometimes, in the thick pine forests, one came upon a path which ran through a clearing cut down the mountain side. The enemy was hidden in the woods on the other side of the gulley, only 200 or 300 yards away, and his sentinels could follow every movement along the path. As a general rule it was wise to make

a detour to avoid the danger of bullets fired at so close a range, but there were days when the Germans were subdued, and one was pretty sure that they would not fire unless they were fired upon first. So it was that twenty of us were able, in small groups, to pass over a particular section of path which they could at any moment have swept with a mitrailleuse. A day or two before they had received what the French called a "*correction sérieuse*" (a serious lesson) and had tested by experience the effect of 6,000 shells thrown into their lines in a single day. The day we were there they had been given a holiday, and they were extremely anxious not to break its tranquillity; consequently they let our party pass without a shot being fired.

"We should never allow any excitement of this kind on the German side," said a French officer as we were passing. "Our sentries are ordered to fire on every man they see; consequently the Germans are very careful not to show themselves. They must have to walk miles to avoid the paths which are under our fire. Of course, they may have let us off this time because the sun is in their eyes. It is surprising how difficult it is to see when you are on a hillside, and the sun is low and facing you."

As a matter of fact, it was hard to imagine that one could be in any danger on an open mountain path without a living soul in sight. Occasionally a row of lopped-off pine branches, forming a screen along the outer edge of the path, suggested that a particularly dangerous point had been reached. The officers with us several times pointed out to the men corners at which such screens should be erected. But, screens or no screens, the mountains seemed lifeless and deserted.

Sometimes, however, one was suddenly brought back to a realisation of war. Aeroplanes could be of but little assistance in this thickly wooded country, yet from time to time a reconnaissance was attempted, despite the great difficulty of finding ground flat enough for landing. Then the valleys began to echo with reports of anti-aircraft guns, and little puffs of shrapnel broke out all across the sky. The aeroplane passed on its way serenely and disappeared behind a hilltop, while the sound of the guns died gradually further and further away.

In this woodland warfare, in which for the greater part of the time they were fighting an unseen foe, the troops depended much upon their officers. In the section of which we are speaking the General in command was a dashing officer, whose daring and gaiety had no small effect on all the soldiers who obeyed his orders. On one occasion he was visiting the first line when a German shell exploded in the trench only a few yards from where he was standing. There was a *poilu* standing at the General's side, and at the explosion he threw up his hands and staggered back against the wall of the trench. The General stood firm and erect, never moving a muscle until, the danger over, he turned quietly to the soldier beside him and said: "You should salute the shell that salutes your general!"

Continual vigilance was necessary in these mountains, for at any moment a German patrol might try to worm its way through to a point within rifle shot, hoping to pick off a sentry or some incautious soldier. The sentinels were always on the *qui vive*, and at night were assisted by watchdogs, who slept in kennels beside their masters. One of these dogs was famous

for two things : in the first place, he bit every French soldier who came near him except his master ; and in the second, he slept so soundly at night and snored so loudly that most of the French soldiers whom he was supposed to guard declared that he was absolutely useless. His master, however, said that such accusations were libels. It was true that Mitrailleur, as he was called, was rather short-tempered and sometimes took a small piece off a soldier's leg when it was offered too temptingly ; also he snored and slept well when there was no danger ; but he was awake and growling at the slightest sound that might come from the enemy's side. As a rule such a sound would be the cracking of a stick or a rustling of dry leaves, followed, when an adventurous German was reaching the French lines, by the creaking noise of a shaken wire.

In such fighting the bayonet has a manifest advantage over the rifle. Rifles mean cartridges, and cartridges are heavy. Moreover, in this broken country, many cartridges are inevitably wasted. The bayonet needs nothing but itself, and when it has been well driven in and scientifically withdrawn from a German body it is still as useful as ever.

Supplies were brought up to the lines in this district with remarkable ease, despite the steepness of the hills. Motor waggons went forward, thanks to the cover afforded by the ground, to within a comparatively small distance of the front line. As soon as points were reached at which the roads were exposed to German fire it was found advisable to make use of horse-drawn carts, as they offered a less attractive target. Then, when the supplies had been brought through the ravines to the very foot of the mountains, they were

loaded on the backs of mules, which can make their way everywhere.

The present war has provided the hills of the Vosges with a system of well-paved paths and tracks such as very few mountainous regions can boast. The most precipitous ascents can now be traversed on muleback, while the officer in charge of any section of the lines can ride without difficulty from end to end of his command. As a rule he lives at a central point, and his horse stands saddled, ready to carry him anywhere on the slightest alarm.

In the section I visited it was remarkable how the military authorities had done everything in their power to keep local industries still working. By the side of a torrent in a ravine, within rifle shot of the enemy, I saw a sawmill hard at work. The major told me with some pride that he was responsible for repairing the machinery of the mill, which before the war had long been disused. The French army needed an unceasing supply of planks for cantonments and the like, and the men of the Vosges made the most of the great provision of timber afforded them by the mountain forests. Lower down in the valley, just 1,000 yards from the Germans, and fully exposed to their fire, lay a small village which possessed a cotton factory. We passed it at a moment when one of the shifts was leaving work. The workpeople were nearly all women, and they came out into the street talking and laughing as if they were in perfect safety, just as they had done two years before, when they had not thought of the possibility of war. Yet when the Germans were annoyed they regularly bombarded that factory, and the workpeople took refuge in the cellars and bomb-proof shelters until the bombardment was over. Then they came up again, repaired

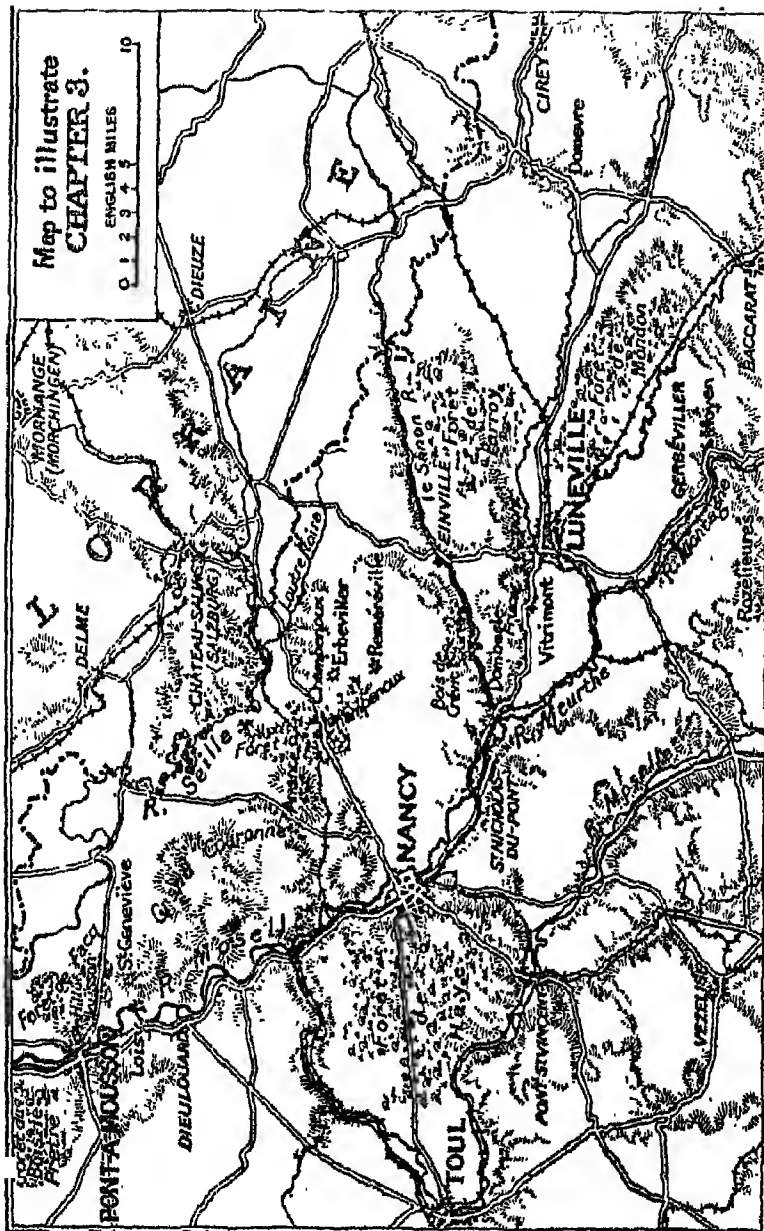
the damage caused by the German shells, and set to work again as placidly as if shells and sudden death had always been one of the most ordinary features of their lives.

St. Dié is a typical Vosges town, clean and broad-streeted, and it has suffered its many bombardments with a serenity that befits the mountains. Even when shells were falling in the streets, its principal inn could provide an excellent meal, and its proprietor was doing a roaring trade with the officers stationed there. It was here that I saw a German prisoner brought in, long-haired and spectacled, and as unlike a soldier as anything that could be imagined. He talked French almost without accent, thanks to many years in the Latin Quarter of Paris, and, as he volubly explained, he was far more suited to be a student than a warrior. He was, as a matter of fact, a professor of philology. The men who brought him in were extremely pleased with their capture, and were never tired of telling the story, with that rich meridional accent which marked them out as Marseillais. The German, who had been left behind during a French advance, had hidden himself up a tree, and from that point of vantage he watched for some time the French troops from the Midi organising the conquered ground. He noticed their accent, and his experience in France had taught him that "Marius" is the generic name of the Marseillais. Hoping that that knowledge might soften the hearts of his captors, he called out from his hiding-place when he felt that escape was impossible, and that weariness was overcoming him: "*Eh, Marius! Je me rends.*" His hopes were fulfilled, and when I saw him he seemed to be on the best of terms with the Marseillais who were guarding him.

Map to illustrate CHAPTER 3.

ENGLISH MILES

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



CHAPTER III

LORRAINE

OF all the towns immediately behind the French front Nancy is the most attractive. Throughout the length and breadth of France one may search in vain for such a work of art as the Place Stanislas. Nowhere else in all the world has a great artist dared to sport so lavishly, so daintily, and so fantastically with gilt and wrought iron. The gates and lanterns of the Place Stanislas are a poet's dream. Never was architect more truly master of his craft than Emmanuel Héré, who, understanding the beauty of little things, set about his square not houses towering to the sky, but buildings of two and three storeys, which are so divinely proportioned that their height is lost in contemplation of the perfect whole.

From August 12th, 1870, to August 1st, 1873, three years all but eleven days, Nancy suffered the tyranny of Germany and was held by the invaders as a conquered town. Before August, 1914, it was a commonplace with military experts that in case of war Nancy would be occupied by the Germans within the first few days. The Germans, for their part, had no doubt that Nancy would fall without a blow being struck in its defence, and one of their reservists, a railway employé in the town — Nancy, the nearest French town to the eastern frontier, had more than

its fair share of Germans—had orders to join his regiment in the Place Stanislas on the third day of mobilisation.

French and German military experts were agreed that Nancy would fall an easy prey to the invader from the East, but General Joffre had his own ideas on the matter, and his whole plan, which resulted in the victory of the Marne, was based on the assumption that General de Castelnau's army would be able to hold its positions round Nancy and prevent the enemy breaking through on the eastern frontier in the direction of the gap of Mirecourt. Events have proved that General Joffre was right.

I first visited Nancy in January, 1915, when it was certainly one of the gayest towns in France. The glorious defence of the Grand Couronné, the semi-circle of hills which protects Nancy on the north-east, from Ste. Geneviève to Amance, was fresh in everyone's mind, and Nancy had just enough experience of war to comprehend the full meaning of the victory won four months before.

Even on that black September day when for the first and last time the Germans pushed forward a battery of six-inch guns within range of the city, and it seemed that they had turned the southern point of the Grand Couronné, the people of Nancy kept calm and confident. Forty shells fell into the town, and then the bombardment suddenly ceased. The word ran round that the danger was over and that the enemy's battery had been destroyed.

Slowly and remorselessly the Germans, straining every nerve to take the town, had driven back the French defence. On the plateau of Amance huge projectiles

had been hailed, until it seemed that the very insects upon it must have been killed, their fragile bodies torn to pieces by shocks that would rend the hardest rocks to atoms. So it was that the Germans reached the forest of Champenoux and brought up a battery of big guns. Quite comfortably and at their ease the gunners began to fire over the slopes and trees in front of them, behind which lay their huge unseen target of the open city. They knew from experience that they could outrange the heaviest French artillery by more than two miles. Suddenly, however, shells began to burst at no great distance, sometimes behind, sometimes to the side—the deadly little shells of the French “75,” the deadliest weapon of modern war. At first they thought that a French battery hidden behind the forest trees was firing at random, for there had been no aeroplane to spy out their position. But steadily the shells came nearer and nearer, until at last one burst right among the guns, filling the air with countless deadly fragments of flying steel. Then they came fast and furious, directed unerringly to the target by an unseen eye. One German gun was dismounted; round a second piece the gun’s crew lay lifeless. Very gallantly the men left the disabled gun and sought to serve the second piece. But the fire was too heavy. After a round or two the second gun was out of action, and the French fire was concentrated on a third, until at last the whole battery was silenced, and the few gunners who remained took refuge in the underwood. Then a man who had been lying on the border of the forest just where it ran out in a sharp point towards the east and overlooked the German battery, unseen by the enemy, who were all around

him, set out to crawl back to his own lines. It was a French officer who, with a telephone and three kilometres of wire, had been correcting the fire of his guns beyond the forest, and who had held at his post till every German gun was silent.

One of the characteristics of the fighting in Lorraine was the invisibility of the troops engaged. At one point we were less than three miles from the enemy's lines. Our motors had been left under the crest of a hill for fear of attracting the enemy's fire. Along the crest of the hill itself ran the second line of the French trenches, looking very cold and uninviting, half full of frozen water. On the left the trench ran down into a little valley and up again on the further side like a brown scar on the hillside, and on the right it disappeared in a dense wood. Straight ahead in the foreground was a small village clustered on a slope. It had suffered little from shell fire, as the projectiles of both sides generally passed over it, but it could only be revictualled at night for fear of attracting the enemy's fire. Guns were booming away steadily in the distance, but, apart from the noise, it would be hard to imagine a more peaceful scene. The whole countryside was desolate as only the French country can be. Apart from our own party, there was no sign of life in sight except for a sentry and a country cart lumbering along towards us. The sentry, as he stood muffled up to the eyes beside a rough shelter made of branches which marked the beginning of the first line of defence, looked in his dark blue uniform against the snow-covered fields as though he had stepped out of a picture by Meissonier. The cart seemed as peaceful as a farm cart can seem, and at the first glance one did not

notice that its carters were soldiers and that it was carrying a wounded man to the rear. In that district there was one man and more to every square rod, and yet these were the only living beings in sight.

In the background on a hill that marked the further bank of the Seille, the frontier river, stood a long low red farmhouse. At first sight there was nothing to distinguish it from any other farmhouse, but a word from an officer had the power to give it a special interest of its own. It marked the position of the German outposts. Through the glasses we could distinguish the brown lines of the German trenches cut in the slopes below it and, for an instant, a black figure of a sentry, which immediately after disappeared. No doubt he thought our party unworthy of his attention. The guns were booming on either side, and these were all the visible signs of war, unless one might count grey wreaths of smoke that floated lightly above the forest.

Instinctively one's mind went back to the tales of Iroquois and Sioux, of Hawkeye and the last of the Mohicans. The woods were full of men armed to the teeth and seeking one another's lives, but there was nothing to betray their presence, no sign except the thin smoke that clung to the tree tops, no sound except the distant thunder of the guns. Over there, on the further side of the Seille valley, the smoke was rising from the German camp fires; nearer it betrayed the huts where the French were cooking their evening meal.

Trapper and Indian, when in days gone by they hid their trail so cunningly and vied with one another in the art of invisibility, had no fear of observation from

above. The sky was still the birthright of the birds, and man had no part in it to make war from the clouds. So that if their tracks and their camp were hidden from the sight of those who walked on the ground like themselves they had achieved their end. But to-day a new instinct is being developed. The soldier, when he has found shelter, must feel instinctively whether he is hidden not only from eyes on a level with his own, but also from those of the aviator who glides far above, like Chil the Kite in the "Jungle Book," waiting and watching for things to die. If but a glimpse is given to the watcher above, a signal follows, and in an instant the secret refuge has become the target of every gun within range.

The ingenuity with which men and guns were hidden passes description. In the forest one might catch a glimpse of little huts, like the woodcutter's hut of a fairy tale, thatched with oak branches to which the shrivelled leaves were still clinging, so that the sharpest eye might pass them by in the winter brown of the undergrowth. The one touch of colour I noticed was given by a hut of bright green canvas, which had obviously been built to match the luxuriant summer foliage.

The guns were concealed with even greater cunning. The wind was cruel, driving before it a few flakes of frozen snow, when we set out in quest of a battery on a certain shell-torn plateau. We struggled on as best we could across the rough waste ground, threading our way through the countless pits opened in the stony soil by German shells. Then, when we had scrambled over a deep-cut communication trench, the staff officer who was guiding us suddenly admitted that he was at a

loss. "I have been to this battery three times," he said, "and each time I have had a regular hunt for it. Even now I do not feel sure that we are right. If it is not over there, I do not know where it is!"

As he spoke he pointed to some uninviting hummocks on our right, sparsely covered with snow. There was nothing about them to suggest that they differed in any way from other mounds that we had climbed over or skirted round, but hoping for the best, we pushed on towards them, with the wind beating in our faces. It was only when we came right up to them that we discovered that there really was something strange about them. It is not usual for a little hill to have a front door to it, even if that front door is so cunningly made of brushwood hurdles that it can scarcely be distinguished from the tangled grass and brambles round it. Such a door should lead to the haunts of gnomes and of the little people who live underground, and one felt a certain sense of impropriety when our major tapped sharply upon it, instead of pronouncing some mysterious "open sesame." The door swung back promptly on its clumsy leather hinges, and there peered out of the opening in the side of the mound a face so bristling with hair that, but for the *képi*, it might have belonged to some treasure-guarding gnome.

Bending low, the major plunged underground, and we followed him, stumbling down a flight of clumsy steps to find ourselves in a gun emplacement surrounded by half a dozen reservists, all equally cheerful and all equally deserving of their pet name of "*poilu*." The burrow was lighted by a gap into the upper world some eight feet long by three feet broad. Through this gap

the workmanlike muzzle of an evil-looking field gun was contemplating the melancholy prospect, in the foreground a few yards of rising ground, then the bare top branches of a tree, showing over the crest of the hill, and beyond nothing but grey wind-driven snow clouds. Rarely or never has the modern artilleryman the satisfaction of seeing his target.

They were by no means uncomfortable quarters, sheltered and warm below the surface of that bleak wind-swept plateau. The gun was buried some six feet down, and the earth above it was propped up by a network of beams and planks. Still more cosy were the sleeping quarters, some twelve feet lower. To reach them one plunged down a narrow dark hole and, after knocking one's head against the beams of the roof more or less violently in the darkness, clambered down a ten-foot ladder. The whole descent recalled Alice's plunge into the white rabbit's burrow which led to Wonderland. At the foot of the ladder there was a subterranean passage, which turned sharply to the left into a little cave, where there was room for a dozen men to curl themselves up in the straw. The stuffiness of the atmosphere was distinctly pleasant after the bitter cold of the air outside, and two men, awakened by our sudden apparition, grunted out a sleepy welcome. The largest shell might have burst in the ground immediately above their heads without waking them so effectually.

The other guns of the battery were similarly concealed and defied detection from any quarter. The German air scouts had hunted for them again and again, but never had the keenest-eyed observer succeeded in locating their position.

The importance of the operations round Nancy and the repulse of the German advance from Lunéville towards the Moselle in August and September, 1914, has been to some extent obscured by the operations nearer home which resulted in the victory of the Marne. Yet General Joffre's plan would have collapsed if the French armies round Nancy had failed to hold their ground. On August 14th the French began a general offensive along the eastern frontier, and drove the German covering troops before them with such success that on August 18th they believed that they had defeated and demoralised the enemy's forces. On August 20th, however, the French offensive came to a standstill. The French plan was to mask Metz, striking north and south of it towards Sarrebourg on the one hand and towards Château Salins (Salzburg) and Morhange (Morchingen) on the other. This plan was defeated by the discovery of very strong German positions carefully prepared beforehand and abundantly provided with heavy artillery. A battle ensued in which the French received a very severe check. The Germans took the offensive, and on August 21st the French were obliged to assume the defensive, falling back on the Grand Couronné of Nancy.

At this point the German commanders seem to have made the same mistake as the French after their first battles with the German covering troops. They assumed that the French army under General de Castelnau, which they had repulsed, was completely demoralised, and contented themselves with masking its positions round Nancy while they pushed forward in force to the south of that town. Their object appears to have been twofold: in the first place, they hoped to

surround Nancy and Toul and to invest the French army in these towns; in the second place, they aimed at breaking through the French line at the point known as the "Trouée de Mirecourt," where there is a gap of some fifty miles between the fortresses of Toul and Epinal. On August 22nd the Germans entered Lunéville, and for the next two days their victorious advance swept on southwards and westwards across the Meurthe and the Mortagne, almost to the banks of the Moselle.

But in these five days' respite General de Castelnau had reorganised his army. His men had lost very heavily, particularly in artillery, but, thanks to the neighbourhood of the fortress of Toul, he was able to fill up all the gaps in his *matériel*. On the 25th he ordered a general offensive along the whole French line both north and south of Nancy. The French attacks from the Grand Couronné drove back the Germans after desperate fighting, and imperilled the enemy's line of communications. The German commander, realising that the French army which he had left on his flank at Nancy was still formidable, recalled two army corps from Lunéville and the south, and south of Lunéville the French began to sweep back the invader from the banks of the Moselle.

General de Castelnau's sledge-hammer blows on the enemy's flank had accomplished their purpose. The enemy perforce changed his objective. The plan of breaking through the gap of Mirecourt was abandoned, and every effort was concentrated on breaking through the Grand Couronné and taking Nancy. From September 1st to September 12th a series of violent attacks was directed against these positions, which

stretch in a great semicircle from Mousson and Ste. Geneviève on the north to Amance on the east. It was at the moment of the retreat from the Marne. The German attacks failed completely to break through the iron ring, and on September 12th the enemy fell hastily back to the positions which they subsequently held along the Seille and its tributary the Loutre Noire. The eastern armies under General de Castelnau had accomplished their mission: they had held their ground and so prevented the French right wing from being turned. A staff officer told me that though the French were burning to pursue the retreating enemy, they had been ordered by headquarters to take no risks at all, since the whole success of General Joffre's plan depended not on the gaining of a great victory in the east, but on the maintenance of the French lines against all attacks.

It was on August 20th that the French were defeated in the bloody battle of Morhange. Their advance, pressed forward overhastily, broke against lines of powerfully prepared positions, which had been provided with heavy artillery from the fortress of Metz. The German guns completely outranged the French artillery, and there was nothing left but to retreat. On August 21st the Germans began to advance south of Nancy, towards Lunéville and the Moselle. The German army, consisting of the 2nd and 3rd Bavarian Corps, the 21st Saxon Corps, and two corps of Ersatz Reserve under Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, as it marched southwards, seized the heights on the west of the main road between Lunéville and Château Salins, in order to protect its line of communications against any attack directed against it from Nancy. General de Castelnau

had at his disposal five corps and a division of reserve. His troops had been severely tried, and no offensive could be attempted until they had been reorganised. However, among the hills and woods that stretch from the plateau of Amance southwards to Lunéville the French held their ground heroically. But the Germans would not be denied, and they captured height after height and wood after wood towards Dombasle and St. Nicholas, south-east of Nancy, while their main body pressed on towards the Moselle.

The ruined farm of Léomont above Vitrimont and a mile or so west of Lunéville, commands the battlefield, and from there it was easy to judge how desperate the struggle had been. A few hundred yards to the west was the hill of Frescati, 900 feet above the level of the sea, which was the key to this part of the position. After endless attacks and counter-attacks, Frescati was taken by the enemy, but Léomont, though dominated by it, still held out. The whole farm was destroyed by shell fire, almost as completely as if it had passed through an earthquake. The slopes all round it were literally riddled with conical shell-holes. Under a storm of shells and bullets, the Bavarians advanced and captured the farm, and the French fell back to their second line of positions. From Léomont the Germans could see the factory chimneys of Dombasle and St. Nicholas, and no doubt believed that they had turned the position of the Grand Couronné, and that they need anticipate no further danger from Nancy.

But the hilly country of the Meurthe and Moselle provides a series of admirable positions one behind the other. From the farm of Léomont the Bavarians had

to descend the hillside, which offered no cover at all, under a rain of bullets from the trenches on the other side of the valley and from the wood that crowned the slope. A direct attack was impossible, but the enemy was determined to reach the wood commanding Dombasle at any cost. A brigade worked its way up the valley and actually reached the little *col* at the head of it which marks the border of the wood. Here it suddenly melted away. The men who had advanced so fearlessly under rifle fire turned to fly in every direction, but death was upon them. They had been carefully drawn under the concentrated fire of forty-eight 75-millimetre guns, hidden on the other side of the wood. The exact range was known to the gunners, and as soon as the word was given a storm of shell was poured upon the advancing enemy. The forty-eight guns could each fire twenty rounds a minute, so that the whole hillside was swept with a perfect inferno of fire and steel. No troops could live before such an onslaught, and the remnants of the brigade fell back on the farm of Léomont in complete disorder. The German advance had at this point reached its extreme limit.

Further north similar engagements had taken place. The Germans had carried 360-metre Hill, and desperate fighting ensued in the Bois de Crévic, which crowned it. On August 24th the German lines facing Nancy extended in a semicircle from Champenoux, immediately below the plateau of Amance, the southernmost point of the Grand Couronné, through Erbéviller, Réméréville, Einville, and Crévic, to the farm of Léomont. At Champenoux they were only ten miles from the traditional capital of Lorraine. They had

made no attack on the Grand Couronné, north-east of Nancy, and were pressing forward south of that town towards the Moselle and the "Trouée de Mirecourt," through which they appeared to have an almost clear road to Paris. In this advance they reached Roze-lieures, about half-way between the Mortagne and the Moselle.

On August 25th General de Castelnau ordered his army to assume the offensive from all its positions both to the north and south of Nancy, and directed a series of sledge-hammer blows at the German flank. The Germans soon found, to their cost, that his army had been reorganised, and that its *moral* was quite unimpaired. Along all the positions round Nancy the French began to drive back the Germans and recapture the heights in the direction of the enemy's line of communications. After heavy fighting, the farm of Léomont and the heights of Frescati were retaken; from Champenoux the Germans were driven back across the frontier. The continuous pressure all along their line threatened at any moment to cut their communications with Germany, and any further advance along the Moselle could only be attempted with the utmost danger. The German commanders realised the danger of their position. They had, with a manœuvre not unlike that of General von Kluck at the battle of the Marne, made a flank march past an enemy that was still undefeated, and now the presence of the troops concentrated round Nancy had become a serious peril. They at once withdrew two army corps from Lunéville, to protect their flank, and from that moment the idea of breaking through the gap of Mirecourt was abandoned. Nancy became the objective of the German armies.

Meantime further south the French offensive drove back the enemy from the positions he had reached between the Moselle and the Mortagne. After three days' fighting the Germans had been thrown across the Mortagne, and the French had established themselves in a hastily constructed line of trenches on the edge of the plateau on the eastern side of the river, just above Gerbéviller. It was at this point that an exceptionally interesting engagement was fought between a French reserve brigade and the German rearguard.

The German right held the valley of Falensène, that runs up from Gerbéviller and forms the northern boundary of the plateau. The German centre and left held the plateau itself. The German position was very strong, and had been carefully prepared. The valley of Falensène was almost a death-trap, since an assault passing along its narrow passage would have to advance uphill for a mile or more over open ground, exposed to the fire of an enemy securely entrenched in the shelter of the woods that crowned the head of the valley. Above, on the plateau which formed the centre and left of the German position, any attack from the line of trenches on the edge of the plateau above the Mortagne would have to pass over some 600 yards of open ground before it reached the first line of German trenches on the nearer bank of the main road from Gerbéviller to Moyon and Rambervillers. At the back of these trenches a second line ran on the opposite border of the road, and behind came the last and most formidable line of defence, in the woods called the Bois de Rappes and the Bois de la Paxé. These woods, consisting mainly of scrub oak and dense with entangled undergrowth and summer foliage, seemed, even without

artificial defences, almost impregnable, and the Germans had filled them from one end to the other with countless invisible trenches, cunningly concealed beneath boughs and leaves. If by some extraordinary chance a single man reached the wood alive, he would find himself in a veritable rabbit warren of trenches and shelters, and a hail of bullets would be poured upon him by an unseen foe from every mound of earth and every clump of underwood.

On the other hand, the French position was far from secure. They had as their only communication with the other bank of the Mortagne a fragile foot-bridge. The Germans, in their retreat, had fortunately failed to destroy this bridge, but once they had checked the French advance on the edge of the plateau, they opened upon it a heavy fire from their big guns stationed in the rear. The observation post on the plateau, which was concealed in a clump of trees, could see the bridge quite clearly, and did its utmost to correct the artillery fire. Six-inch shells kept falling in the Mortagne on either side of the bridge, throwing up great fountains of water fifty feet and more into the air, but it was never once touched. Despairing of the attempt, they endeavoured to throw their shells over the railway embankment, behind which a portion of the French troops was massed to support the attack. The railway embankment on the other side of the river offered a perfect mark, and its slope was covered with shell-holes, but the only occasion on which the German fire reached the French position was when, guided by a Red Cross flag, they dropped several shells into an ambulance, which was completely destroyed.

Thanks to the foot-bridge, the French could push up

reinforcements to their men on the other bank, though only slowly. They could not, however, get their artillery across the river, and they posted their battery of six-inch Rimailhos on the other bank at some 2,500 yards from the actual scene of the battle. It was connected with the other bank by a telephone, which ran to a small farm building 100 yards or so beyond the line of trenches held by the French on the edge of the plateau.

The troops on this part of the line knew that it was necessary, at any cost, to regain the ground that had been lost by the German advance, and early on the morning of August 31st three regiments of reserve were ordered to make a simultaneous attack along the whole line of the French positions. It would be hard to imagine anything more impressive than the manner in which the story of this battle, with its magnificent heroism, was told us on the slopes where the French had charged and fallen by a staff officer who had himself taken part in it. The day before he had had a narrow escape, as he had been observed by the enemy's look-outs against the sky-line as he was riding with despatches and had been saluted by the shells of a heavy battery which concentrated its fire upon him continuously for about a quarter of an hour. "I had just handed over my despatches," he said, "when the first shell came. I thought at once that it was intended for me, and I started riding as hard as I could to reach shelter 1,500 yards away, making my horse zig-zag to and fro at full gallop. Shells kept bursting all round me, but by an extraordinary piece of luck neither I nor my charger was touched, and I had the satisfaction of knowing that the Germans had wasted a few hundred pounds. While

it lasted I was cool enough, but when it was over I must admit that I was extremely shaky, and it was an experience that I have no desire to repeat."

The officer was speaking on the edge of the plateau, just where it sloped down to the valley of Falensène. The fields were dotted all over with the graves of the soldiers who had fallen in that splendid charge, marked for the most part by rough crosses of wood, that, as they stood outlined against the sky, gave an eerie impression of melancholy to the scene.

"Orders were given," he said, "that the three regiments were to attack simultaneously and carry the German positions with the bayonet. The assault began at the break of day, when everything was covered with a thick blinding mist, and one could scarcely see one's own hand. The 36th Colonial, a reserve regiment, like the others engaged, was ordered to advance up the valley of Falensène and capture the woods at the head of the valley. It was commanded by a captain, as in the recent fighting they had lost twenty-two officers out of thirty. It debouched from Gerbéviller, of which the ruins were in our hands, and, for some reason that now we shall never know, it was rather late in starting. The firing on the plateau above where the other regiments had started at the appointed time had warned the enemy, who also appears to have had notice of our intentions from his spies. Flash signals had been seen in the village, and an inhabitant had been caught telephoning to some mysterious person. The infantry advanced in companies *en échelon*, as far as we could tell from the bodies we picked up, and stretched out across the valley, every two companies having a company in reserve. Guided by the stream

and a rough cart track, they stumbled on through the mist until they reached a point where the valley widens. It was only then that the Germans opened fire. They had the range to a nicety, and nothing could live in the hail of bullets that they poured into our men from their Maxims, which were hidden in the woods. The whole regiment was practically swept out of existence.

"Meantime, while the attack on the German right, along the valley of Falensène, was being annihilated, the 222nd Reserve Regiment dashed from its trenches on the edge of the plateau, and with one magnificent charge drove the enemy, utterly demoralised, from all his lines of defence. The French troops swept over the two lines of trenches along the road, and when they reached the complicated forest position they found no one to oppose them. Their victory seemed complete when they dashed into the woods in pursuit of the flying enemy. In half an hour they had carried everything before them.

"Unhappily, no one had foreseen so speedy a success. Three hours at least had been allowed for them to reach the woods. Consequently, to facilitate their advance, the battery of six-inch Rimhailo guns on the other side of the river began to rain shells upon the woods, which they believed to be still held by the enemy. The effect of the great projectiles in the woods was indescribable. Each explosion filled the air with thousands of splinters from the trees and underwood. Mown down by their own guns, the French infantry still tried to hold the ground that they had won, and which the enemy had entirely abandoned, but the position was untenable. In disorder the survivors of the

regiment fell back to the line of trenches from which they had started, and it was only then that it was possible to telephone to the artillery announcing what damage had been wrought."

On the left of the German position the 292nd Regiment captured the trenches beside the road under a heavy artillery fire from a battery stationed at Moyon. It held these trenches for a time, but when it was seen that the other attacks had failed, it also fell back to its trenches on the edge of the plateau.

The slaughter had been terrible, and it seemed that nothing had been gained. The division engaged in this fighting, which had in a few days been reduced from 14,500 to 8,000 men, was relieved, and was one of the first to enter Lunéville when, on September 12th, it was evacuated by the Germans. Their gallantry had not been entirely lost, as the *moral* of the Germans had been completely shattered. When the Germans returned they removed all the French corpses from the woods to the slope of the plateau, so that it might not appear that so formidable a position had been captured at the point of the bayonet, but when fresh troops advanced they made no further resistance.

By September 1st the Germans, as a result of the unexpected French offensive on their flank, had abandoned their advance towards the Moselle and had taken Nancy as their new objective. They still occupied Lunéville, though apparently without much assurance, as one night they precipitately evacuated the town on account of a false alarm, and only returned the following day. Their main efforts were now directed against the Grand Couronné.

The Grand Couronné is the great semicircle of hills

that guards Nancy on the north-east. Roughly speaking, it runs from Ste. Geneviève, some twelve miles north of Nancy, to the plateau of Amance, about seven miles north-east. Between these two points the country is so broken and so wooded that a direct attack upon the main position appears inevitably doomed to failure. The Grand Couronné is not fortified—it is rumoured that a secret clause of the Treaty of Frankfort forbade such fortification—but even without artificial defences it is a formidable obstacle, and the Germans did not try to break through it, but merely to capture its extreme points, Ste. Geneviève and the plateau of Amance. With Ste. Geneviève in their hands, they would have commanded the right bank of the Moselle, which runs almost due north from Nancy to Metz, and an advance along the river would have brought them into the rear of the Grand Couronné position. The plateau of Amance, on the other hand, commands the direct road from Salzburg to Nancy, through the forest of Champenoux.

It was against Ste. Geneviève that the first German attacks were directed. Two columns marched up the Moselle on either bank of the river from Metz. So far as concerns the column on the western bank, it pushed down south to a point about level with Ste. Geneviève, and from there it subjected that village to a cross-fire from its heavy guns. When the main attack on Ste. Geneviève had been repulsed, it seems to have retired towards Metz without any very serious fighting.

The main attack on Ste. Geneviève was made by the column on the eastern bank of the river. After occupying Pont-à-Mousson and the hill of Mousson,

it established itself in the forest of Facq, which lies at the foot of Ste. Geneviève. The view from Ste. Geneviève, which is situated on the steep slope just below the edge of the Plateau de la Vierge, is a striking one, and even in the circumstances in which I saw it—a strong, biting wind, driving frozen snowflakes that were almost blinding—covered a great extent of country. Looking north, one could follow the valley of the Moselle, on the left Pont-à-Mousson and behind it the forest of Bois-le-Prêtre, from which there came an almost continuous thunder of field guns, showing that hard fighting was going on in the trenches there. A little to the right of the Moselle rose the hill of Mousson, crowned with the ruins of a *château-fort*, and round its base one could distinguish the semicircle of the forest of Facq, which extended to the base of the hill at our feet. Had the weather been clear, we should have seen right away on the horizon the great fortress of Metz.

As for the village of Ste. Geneviève, there was little of it left. Its church had been shattered and its houses torn to pieces by shell-fire. Along the edge of the slope several houses had been dismantled by the French troops in order to protect their trenches, which ran in a straight line up to the Plateau de la Vierge above. It was in the churchyard that Colonel X., who during this action was a major commanding at Ste. Geneviève, told us the story of the fighting. The country round seemed very quiet and peaceful under its mantle of snow, and it was hard to imagine the inferno of fire and steel it must have been a few months before. The gravestones in the churchyard had been broken and shattered by German shells, and in the church

itself a great crucifix seemed the only thing that had escaped destruction.

"On the critical day," said the colonel, "we were being bombarded from two sides. The German guns on the other side of the Moselle were taking us on the flank, and in front their heavy guns were thundering on us from the vantage point of the hill of Mousson, where they were posted just behind the crest. It seemed that nothing could live beneath that avalanche of flame. Our guns were utterly outranged, and we could not even hit back. But our men stuck fast to their trenches, and we soon began to discover that heavy artillery is often more alarming than dangerous. It was General X. who commanded this portion of the defence, and some day I hope they will raise a statue to him in Nancy. He had ordered us to hold fast at any cost, and that we were determined to do. We knew that Ste. Geneviève was the key of the whole position.

"Then the German infantry began to advance. Four or five Bavarian regiments debouched from the forest of Facq below, and advanced uphill across the fields towards the line of our trenches, which ran through Loisy, at the foot of Ste. Geneviève. We had only one regiment, but we had the advantage of position. They came on under a murderous fire most gallantly, and some of them even reached the wire entanglements not fifty yards from our trenches, but there they broke and ran. Those of them who reached the border of the forest were simply torn to pieces by our '75's,' which at last had found something within their range. We had loopholed the walls of the cemetery, which formed part of the line of entrench-

ments, and our fire from that point of vantage was particularly deadly. The next day we picked up over 2,000 German dead, and, to our own astonishment, we had only eighty casualties, despite the enormous amount of ammunition expended by the enemy. The assault on Ste. Geneviève had completely failed, and the key of the Grand Couronné was untaken."

The colonel was one of those splendid types of the French soldier to whom war is the very breath of the nostrils. "*J'aime la guerre*," he said; "it is my profession: it is natural that I should love it!" When he led us up to the Plateau de la Vierge above, where we felt the full force of the gale, he took a positive pleasure in battling against the elements. As we walked along the trenches, with their occasional shelters and "funk-holes," we came across a squad of reservists in dark blue uniform. They saluted their colonel and greeted him with a little of that respectful chaff which is allowed by the splendid *camaraderie* that exists between French officers and their men. They had none of them seen a razor for weeks, but it would have been hard to find a lot of more cheerful and healthy-looking men.

"They are the men who held Ste. Geneviève," he said; "my reservists, *pères de famille*, of any age between twenty-eight and thirty-two. They have a splendid collection of beards and whiskers among them. In war-time shaving is not popular among *mes poilus*, but they fight like demons. We should be only too happy if the Boches would make one little attack more on Ste. Geneviève."

The colonel, somewhat to my surprise, led me to a

not particularly artistic memorial perched on the highest point of the Plateau de la Vierge. It was only when he pointed to the Latin inscription upon it that I realised the meaning of our walk. "In memory of Jovinius," it ran, "who in 366 overthrew the barbarians from Germany." Perhaps some day the name of Joffre will be added to that inscription.

From Ste. Geneviève we motored to the plateau of Amance, at the other extremity of the Grand Couronné. It was along the road from Salzburg, at the foot of this plateau, that the enemy made his main attempt to force his way into Nancy. This road is absolutely commanded by the plateau, and in order to silence any guns that there might be upon it the Germans had brought up a great quantity of heavy artillery from Metz. These guns, well served and posted, outranged the French artillery by over two miles, and up to that time never had soldiers been more prodigal of their ammunition. The surface of the plateau consists of loose, sandy earth holding many large flat stones well calculated to deaden the force of an explosion. On this unpromising target the Germans poured what was estimated by the French at 600 tons of metal or 40,000 shells. One battery of 105-millimetre Rimmilhos was located by an aeroplane and promptly demolished. The whole plateau was riddled with conical shell-holes some four or five feet deep, until it resembled a gigantic Gruyère cheese, but, apart from the battery destroyed, the only damage done by this expenditure of over £200,000 was twenty men put *hors de combat*. "It was no joke," said the major who was conducting us, "to take orders over this plateau until we had made the communication trench you see there with

the telephone wires. Then, however, the danger was negligible."

It was on the following day, when we visited the villages at the foot of this plateau, that we realised why the Germans had bombarded it so thoroughly. At its foot the main road from Nancy to Salzburg runs through the forest of Champenoux, which it divides into two parts. The plateau of Amance falls away very steeply for a few hundred feet, but then the ground slopes away gently to the road and rises again slightly on the other side. The road thus runs in a narrow passage, which is commanded by the heights of Amance.

On August 24th the Germans had reached the village of Champenoux, which is a little to the east of the forest, but on August 25th the French offensive drove them steadily back beyond the Seille. At the beginning of September they had received reinforcements from the two army corps withdrawn from Lunéville, as well as heavy artillery from Metz, and it was along this line that they made their most furious attack on Nancy. They gradually recovered the ground that they had lost on August 25th and the following days. Desperate fighting took place round Réméréville, to the south of the main road. The village lies in a hollow and was strongly entrenched. A battalion stationed there repulsed no fewer than seven assaults, and only retired when it had exhausted its ammunition. Finally, Erbéviller and Champenoux were recaptured, and the Germans advanced to the eastern boundary of the forest of Champenoux.

It must be remembered that all this time the French troops had been exposed to a terrific artillery fire, to

which their own guns, being completely outranged, had no opportunity of replying. The infantry grumbled a little at the silence of their own guns, wondering when the artillery duel was going to begin, but none the less they held their ground unflinchingly. It was when the German infantry began to try and force their way through the narrow passage open to them along the main road between the two portions of the forest of Champenoux that it became apparent that there was some advantage in the French artillery having taken no part in the fight. The German guns had entirely failed to locate the position of the French batteries, and, now that the infantry was giving them a splendid target within their range, they were able to open upon it with terrible effect.

Any advance through the forest of Champenoux was extremely difficult, as the forest is very thick, and practically all the paths in it run north and south at right angles to the road. A party of Germans succeeded in working their way through the forest to a farm at the foot of the plateau of Amance, but there they came under the full fire of the French 75's—notably a battery stationed further back at the foot of the plateau—and were compelled to retire. Their main attack was consequently forced into the narrow passage along the main road, and it soon became clear that they had shot their bolt.

A French counter-attack was ordered and brilliantly executed, despite the difficulty of the ground. The French lost heavily, as they were now compelled to attack along the main road in the same disadvantageous position as the Germans had. They were particularly tried by the fire of the Maxims,

which the French 75's were unable to locate. The Germans, who were already extremely expert in the use of this arm, had posted them, not on the edge of the forest, where they could have been located, but well back in the forest at every point where they could bring a cross-fire to bear upon the road and the slopes above it. However, the attack, backed up by the *mélinite* of the 75's, which did terrible work in the forest, proved successful, and after obstinate fighting the Germans were driven back across the Scille to the positions which they held throughout the winters of 1914 and 1915.

On September 12th Lunéville was evacuated, and the German offensive in the region of Nancy came to an end.

When I visited Nancy at the beginning of 1915 everyone was still elated with the memory of the victorious defence of the Grand Couronné, and even then no one realised how long the war would be. Nancy had been bombarded for a single hour from Champenoux, and it was held that henceforth, since the enemy had been driven back almost to the frontier, the town had no more to fear from German guns. Aeroplane bombardments were accepted as inevitable annoyances to which all towns within fifty miles of the firing line are necessarily exposed, and the only fear expressed was that a chance bomb might injure the Place Stanislas. One aeroplane bomb, indeed, fell in the gardens just behind the square; it cut a good-sized tree in half, bespattered a neighbouring house with splinters, but did no irreparable damage.

In Paris the German aeroplane has become a

comparatively familiar object. There is something more aggravating than alarming in the appearance of the mosquito-like craft sailing serenely over the city, with the evening sun painting colours on its wings. It seems in another world, and even the crashing detonations of the bombs which it drops into neighbouring streets fail to bring home its relation to the crowd of upturned faces in the boulevard below.

We passed under an Aviatik when we were driving from Nancy to Lunéville, and the impression it produced was very different from that produced by a Taube over Paris. Though it was flying very high, the warning black cross beneath its wings was clearly visible, and as its planes shivered a little in the varying breeze, it seemed a hawk hovering over its prey. It looked evil and merciless enough, but there in the open country there was nothing to shock the spirit of fair play, as there had been in Paris. From a hill near by there came a little sputter of musketry, just as we had heard in the city streets, and the Aviatik flew on, evidently thinking our party unworthy of its attention. Later we discovered that this particular "bird of evil" had no more common-sense or idea of fair play than the aeroplanes which killed women and children in Paris. It had dropped half a dozen purposeless bombs on Lunéville, and if it did not kill any non-combatant, that was certainly not its fault. As for its moral effect, an old lady of the town told me exactly how she felt about it at a tea-party that afternoon. "We are so accustomed to their aeroplanes," she said, "that we do not trouble to look at them; and as for their bombs, I assure you they really

do not startle me so much as the horrible noise that the shopkeepers make every evening when they pull down their iron shutters."

Life in such towns as Lunéville, only a few miles from the Germans, was almost normal. On the eastern frontier the memories of 1870 have never been forgotten, and occupation by a brutal invader, an idea that to the English mind was before the war almost inconceivable, was remembered as a matter of experience, just as any other unpleasant event might be. The Germans had come, and had been driven away, never to return; this fact was quite enough for the inhabitants of Lorraine.

Kindly invited to tea by the Mayor of Lunéville, we found ourselves in the midst of a gay gathering which differed in no way from a similar function in time of peace, except that military uniforms predominated over civilian clothes. While the teacups went round and, in French fashion, glasses of champagne were served, people talked of the German inroad, which was only a few weeks old, in the detached fashion in which people in England might talk of atrocities in China or the Balkans. The Mayor told us quite simply how he had demanded an apology for acts of unspeakable barbarity and the punishment of the guilty soldiers from a new German governor of the town. The General replied that none of his men would dare to be such brutes; the soldiers responsible belonged to another army corps, and for them he could not be responsible, but while he was there he would see to it that the inhabitants of Lunéville were properly treated. The Mayor, who was held as a hostage and was quite prepared to be shot out of hand, consented to accept

this assurance. "I hesitated," he said, "when the Boche held out his hand, but I decided to take it, for what he said was true, and while he was governor here there were no atrocities." The story was told in the same unemotional tone which the Mayor's wife used when she described how her husband was taken away and shut up for days in the Town Hall as a hostage, while perforce she entertained the entire German staff in her historic house, where the Treaty of Lunéville was signed.

Even so close behind the lines there was no scarcity of provisions or even of luxuries. At luncheon, near the front, such a meal was set before us as could not be surpassed in the most famous restaurants of Paris. The table was decorated with carnations that could only have come from the Riviera coast, and on the menu there figured Marennes oysters and lobsters, which in some mysterious way had been brought up absolutely fresh from the sea over railway lines that were presumably strained to the utmost under the burden of providing necessities and ammunition for the army.

A whole year passed before my next visit to Nancy. In January, 1916, the Nancéens suddenly discovered that they were not, as they had so confidently believed, out of the range of the German guns. I arrived in the town after a motor drive from Châlons, through the Argonne, *viâ* Verdun (with the late Richard Harding Davis, than whom there was never more charming travelling companion), just after the third bombardment. Over fifty 380-millimetre (fifteen-inch) shells, fired from a long range naval gun, mounted by the enemy near Château Salins, had fallen near the town.

A map of the danger zones in Western Europe would be curious evidence of the extraordinary change that has come over warfare. In the past outside the actual fighting area there was little danger either for combatants or civilians, except perhaps from a daring cavalry raid. To-day, however, miles away from all active operations, a civilian has an excellent chance of being killed for his country, as Londoners have discovered only too well from the Zeppelin raids. This insecurity behind the lines is all the more striking because never before in the history of the world has there been such a complete line of fortifications drawn right across a continent.

At the beginning of the war not even military experts realised the full meaning of modern long range guns. French artillerymen, with one or two exceptions, had declared that heavy guns were a mere delusion, owing to their want of mobility and the impossibility of directing their fire accurately. Soon after hostilities began General de Castelnau's headquarters were at a village well in the rear of the lines, and everyone supposed that they were quite out of the range of the enemy's guns. Suddenly, while the staff was at lunch, everyone was startled by a tremendous explosion. A big shell had landed from the clouds into the middle of the village, killing eighteen horses and five men.

It remained for the Germans, who had first used aircraft for the killing of innocent civilians, to utilise the long range gun for the same honourable purpose. Dunkirk was the first town to suffer. It will be remembered that when Dunkirk was bombarded the surprised inhabitants attributed it to the German fleet, which

was supposed to be firing on the town from some invisible point in the North Sea. It was not long, however, before it was discovered that the enemy had indulged in the luxury of bringing up a fifteen-inch naval gun to the lines. After Dunkirk, Compiègne, Châlons, St. Ménéhould, Verdun, Belfort, and Nancy had the doubtful pleasure of being chosen as targets for the big German gun. The Germans no doubt believe that these casual, haphazard bombardments produce an impression on the *moral* of the people behind the lines, for they must be well aware that they cannot hope to achieve anything of any military value.

It must be admitted that bombardment by fifteen-inch shells is a most uncomfortable experience. The idea of a ton of metal and explosives travelling over twenty miles through the air and landing more or less at haphazard in a town is not encouraging to a civilian's nerves.

I was in an hotel at Châlons one night, going up rather late to my room, when there came a tremendous noise, an uncomfortable rumble, like an approaching express train dashing over a badly laid track in mid-air, followed by a deafening explosion. After the explosion there was a second's deadly silence; then the hotel began to buzz and hum like a hive of frightened bees. Every door in the corridor through which I was passing opened suddenly, and people in varying stages of undress and sleepiness poked out their heads. Seeing someone fully dressed in the corridor, they unreasonably concluded that the nocturnal wanderer must be fully informed as to the noise that had awakened them, and shot out a chorus of confused questions, in

which the word "Zeppelin" seemed to dominate. I had no clear ideas on the subject, as it was my first experience of fifteen-inch shells arriving from twenty miles away, and though I was convinced from the terrific rush of the projectile through the air that it was no aircraft bomb, the Zeppelin explanation seemed as good and as tranquillising as any. So I replied gravely, "No doubt it is only a Zeppelin!" and then hastened off to my room, devoutly hoping that there would be no repetition of the incident, while people shut their doors, hurling fervently at the Boches the deadly insult of "*Les cochons!*" and went to bed.

The Châlons police were very active that evening, and before the next shell arrived—we only had four that evening—I was disturbed by the arrival of an hotel servant, who told me that the gendarmes were in a great state because they could see a crack of light through my windows. There was no electric light in the hotel, as the Germans had destroyed the power station when they fell back from Châlons, and its proprietor, who must have made a fortune since the German retreat, regarded an oil lamp as an unheard-of luxury, so that all the illumination I had been able to scrape together with the idea of doing some work before I went to bed was a couple of far from brilliant candles. The police were certainly wide awake that night to detect a glimmer of their fitful rays passing through the heavy curtains which shrouded my windows.

Next day, when it came to taking stock of the damage caused by these unwieldy shells, the impressive character of the bombardment was entirely spoilt. It is amazing, even in a town, how much waste

ground there is where shells can burst without doing a halfpennyworth of damage or destroying even a cat. The Germans probably realised that their bombardment was a failure, as the next day they sent a Zeppelin and the day after an aeroplane, which dropped a few bombs about the place, made a great deal of noise, and scarcely succeeded in frightening anyone. The big German gun never fired on Châlons again.

A picturesque account of its destruction was given by M. Georges Prade in *Le Journal*. The first of the fifteen-inch shells which were fired on the morning of the day I arrived in Châlons was heard roaring overhead by an observer in a captive balloon, who at once set to work to watch the enemy's lines for anything unusual that might give a clue to the position of the noisy new-comer. For a long time he could see nothing suspicious; then suddenly it struck him that there was something unfamiliar about a clump of small fir trees on the crest of a distant hill. He studied them through his glasses, but could observe nothing remarkable about them except that they were growing very close together and seemed to have suffered less than any of the woods near, which had been torn to pieces by shell fire. For months he had been studying that particular landscape, and he knew by heart the position of every hill and wood and landmark. He was convinced that that clump of trees had no right to be there. If they had suddenly grown up in the night, it could only be that the Boches had planted them there, and they could only have been planted there to conceal something. What was more likely than that the trees marked the emplacement of their new gun? A word

down the telephone, and six-inch shells began to fall into that clump of trees with unfailing accuracy and regularity.

I cannot vouch for the accuracy of this story, which was current at the time of the bombardment. It certainly omits two important facts the accuracy of which I can guarantee. These facts are two photographs taken from a French aeroplane. The first of these shows the German gun on the heights before it was fired on by the French. Its exact position is shown on the negative by a black circle representing the concrete platform on which the gun was mounted, and the gun appears as a white bar across the centre of the circle. The second negative shows the effects of the French six-inch shells. The symmetry of the platform has disappeared, and it is chequered with holes, while the white bar is no longer in the centre of the circle, proving quite clearly that the gun had been dismounted by the French fire.

The inconsiderable damage caused by the fifteen-inch gun and the efficient way in which it was silenced speedily reassured the people of Châlons, and after the first alarm, when a certain number of cautious inhabitants left, the town resumed its ordinary life.

Belfort, which suffered more severely than Châlons, was bombarded by a fifteen-inch gun mounted on a pivot not far from Mühlhausen. Its position was exactly equidistant from Belfort and —, in the Thann valley, so that when the German gunners were tired of bombarding Belfort they could slue their gun round and throw a few shells into —. One of these shells caused a number of casualties. One man, who

was peacefully sitting in a window, had his head severed from his body by a splinter, and he was a dead man before he had time to take his hands out of his pockets, so little warning was there of approaching death.

The initial velocity of these big shells is so great that they travel faster than sound, and the projectile arrives at its target before the noise of its passage through the air. During the Champagne offensive an officer friend of mine was bombarded by the 380 in a village not far behind the lines. The first announcement of the shell's approach, he told me, was a terrific explosion, so that it was quite impossible to take cover. After the explosion the splinters, instead of making a buzzing sound as they passed through the air, like the splinters of ordinary shells, flew in all directions with a sharp "Whish!" like the whish of a whiplash, which was very uncomfortable hearing. In my hotel at Châlons I must have been at a point where I was nearer to a fraction of the trajectory of the shell than to the point of its explosion, and so was able to hear the rumble of its approach before I heard the crash of its bursting.

One thing the present war has shown—it costs infinitely more to destroy a village or town by high explosive shells than it costs to build it. Perhaps the finest instance of this is Souchez. Souchez is, as an artillery officer expressed it, "beautifully destroyed." There is not one stone left standing on another; there is not even a whole stone or brick. Everything has been ground to powder, and no man can say that here was a road or here a house, for over everything there lies the same shapeless pile of shattered débris. Rarely

even in this war has a village received so many shells as Souchez, and their cost would certainly suffice to build up that village again fifty or a hundred times over.

There exists a certain viaduct which was blown up at the beginning of the war and then repaired by the French at a cost of about £14,000. The Germans disliked that viaduct and brought up a 420 (seventeen-inch) howitzer, with a battery of 210 (eight-inch) howitzers, to batter it to pieces. They succeeded. It took between fifty and sixty 420 shells, and nobody troubled to count the number of 220 shells. But from the calculations that were made by the French there can be little doubt that that particular piece of destruction cost the Germans over £80,000.

Nancy was considerably taken aback by the surprise of receiving over fifty fifteen-inch shells, and there was an exodus of part of its population, though there was surprisingly little damage or loss of life. Many of its shops were closed; some of them were only open between 5 and 7 p.m., when their owners, who had taken refuge in the suburbs, came back to town, considering apparently, for some obscure reason, that the German gunners would respect the *apéritif* hour. In every street there were the notices, which are now familiar in every bombarded town, directing the passer-by who might be surprised by a bombardment to the nearest cellars where shelter could be found. But Nancy soon recovered from the shock; at my next visit I found that its inhabitants had recovered all their gaiety and light-heartedness. The precious fountains of the Place Stanislas were protected with sandbag bastions, but otherwise, apart

from the uniforms, there was no sign of war. On this visit I was able to get that view of Metz which previously at Ste. Geneviève the weather had prevented.

On the hills above the Moselle, north of Nancy, was a certain observation post from which the German fortress town was clearly visible to the naked eye. It was scarcely ten miles away, and the French observers could see everything that was going on within the great fortified camp which was the furthest outpost of the German Empire. In the middle of the sixteenth century Metz became French. After 1870 it became for a time German, but there is no Frenchman who doubts that at the conclusion of this war it will become once again a bulwark of France. Metz and Verdun, which, in the days when fortifications counted, were perhaps the most powerful fortresses in Western Europe, stand face to face, with the two great rivers of the Meuse and the Moselle between them. The one was the inevitable reply to the other.

There is an unquestionable fascination in watching unseen the enemy's movements. One forgets how often the Germans have followed one's own movements and no doubt chuckled at the feeble efforts made by human forms clearly discerned through the telescope to take cover where no cover existed. I well remember the satisfaction of watching German officers promenading through the streets of Altkirch and the sensation of surprise at seeing one of them taking a drive in an open cab within sight of us.

Between Metz and the French lines lay the German

acronautic station of Frescati. At the first glance one might have taken its long rows of drab aeroplane sheds for a bridge or viaduct, as they were cut at regular intervals by small trees set along the roadside which at a distance gave the impression of a dark vista seen through an archway. However, the sight of an aeroplane descending on the aerodrome and being hauled to its shed rapidly corrected this false impression. Motor lorries passed to and fro in rapid succession, and the observer gained a vivid idea of keen activity. Behind the aerodrome one came to the station so often mentioned in the *communiqués*—the Gare des Sablons. This station only existed by the goodwill of the French aviators. From time to time aeroplanes dropped bomb after bomb upon it, and the damage was carefully noted. When the day comes it will surely be swept out of existence.

Further back rose the grey towers and houses of the city itself. Above them all towered the cathedral, and through the glasses one could distinguish the details of its magnificent Gothic architecture. The fine edifice of the Frenchman Pierre Perrat dominates the German town, and since it is the French, and not the Germans, who are attacking the fortress, it remains intact, and has been spared the fate of Rheims and Soissons. There is a legend among the artillery officers in the observation post which I visited that once, on a particularly clear day, a lieutenant set his watch by the cathedral clock of Metz. For the truth of this story I cannot personally vouch, as I must admit that, owing to some local mist, I could not see the clock, but to the left of the cathedral there was a clock on a church tower

from which one could read the hour more or less accurately.

From the military point of view the most interesting thing in the view were the white wreaths of smoke that announced the arrival of trains, no doubt loaded with men, ammunition, and supplies. One could follow their course among the houses, and it would not be difficult to work out the Metz time-table. One thing was certain—the French were very accurately informed as to all that happened in the ancient capital of Lorraine.

If some day the enemy attempts to escape those ever watchful eyes that follow his every movement, and sets to work to bombard all the many hills by which Metz is overlooked, he will be certain to waste a large quantity of ammunition. Such a post could not be touched by the largest shell, since it is buried thirty feet and more beneath the ground. It is a triumph of the miner's art, and is approached by deep tunnels starting from places of absolute security. A shaft was sunk from the very summit of the hill, while simultaneously converging tunnels were driven upwards from its slopes. From the central shaft the miners began to burrow downwards towards these tunnels, and though the engineer captain in charge of the works had only a pocket compass to direct him, the subterranean passages met exactly at the points he had chosen and were only a few inches out of alignment.

At the time of my visit approach to and departure from the observation post was not so easy as it would be when the work was finished. Some agility was required to clamber down a well thirty or forty feet

deep by the aid of a rough wooden ladder, several steps of which were missing. Then, in the depths of the earth, the tunnels were by no means too high, and a trench helmet was practically necessary if a man of average height was not to be knocked out by banging his head against joists and beams. Galleries branched out in all directions, and the impression left upon one was that that hill was as thoroughly honeycombed with passages as if it were inhabited by a particularly industrious breed of enormous ants. Perhaps some day all these works will be forgotten only to be rediscovered by some enterprising archæologist. Then no doubt they will create as much excitement as the discovery of the Labyrinth of Crete, and learned men will speculate and write long books as to their real purpose.

Further forward, near the Germans, tunnelling as complicated and as deep had been going on. One of the principal problems in modern warfare, both in defence and attack, is that of bringing up the reserves, and it has become still more complex since the battle of Verdun, owing to the steadily increasing use of heavy artillery. For the Champagne offensive huge *places d'armes* were constructed; the most famous of them was the "Place de l'Opéra," built of over 20,000 sandbags and capable of sheltering a whole battalion. The Place de l'Opéra is now well in the rear of the front line and affords excellent shelter to a field ambulance, but its rôle as a gigantic *abri* in the front line has passed away for ever.

Nowadays such shelters are regarded as primitive; they are obsolete, so fast has modern warfare developed, and are no more than survivals of an earlier stage. I

have spoken elsewhere of some artificial cave shelters in the Argonne, which enabled large bodies of men to remain in perfect security from all bombardments within a few yards of the advanced lines. In Lorraine the burrowing was even deeper, and no guns yet made could hope to reach the men held in reserve just behind the front trenches. Thousands of the largest shells might be hurled on these new shelters without doing the smallest damage. Round Verdun there was not a yard of ground that had not been torn up by a projectile, but the excavations thus made were, comparatively speaking, not very deep. Guns are not yet so accurate that they can drop shell after shell on exactly the same point, and so force a way through thirty or forty feet of soil or rock. Probably science will invent a means of dealing with the new system, but as things are there exist to-day behind the French lines hundreds of deep-dug shelters that may reasonably be regarded as proof against any artillery.

When we came out from the tunnel into the daylight we found a group of *poilus* playing football, a game that is steadily increasing its devotees throughout the French army. We were, of course, on the slopes away from the enemy. However, to examine at our leisure the exact position of the German army, we worked our way round the hill by a rock path through deserted vineyards and unkempt fields, until we came full in view of the enemy's positions. The Germans could see us better than we could see their trenches, for the westering sun was in our eyes, and no doubt their look-out men were following our movements with much the same interest as we had watched the trains in Metz.

Above the famous Bois-le-Prêtre, a hill which rose bare with a few shattered tree stumps from the surrounding forest, was one of the principal German positions, and there hostile eyes were keeping an unceasing watch. However, our scattered party offered an unsatisfactory target, and that day the Germans wasted no ammunition on us.

Below the observation post of which I have been speaking and athwart the Moselle lies the little town of Pont-à-Mousson, which had the honour of being the first French town to be bombarded by the Germans. From the very beginning of the war it was a perpetual target for their shells. Each bombarded town—and unhappily there are many of them—has a physiognomy of its own. Nieuport is a desert and a ruin; Arras, when I last saw it a few months ago, was bearing its trial with fortitude and confidence, and its houses seemed to hide their scars; Soissons was actually gay; Rheims went about its business in rather hurried fashion; Verdun was a veritable furnace of fire and steel; Thann, in Alsace, was so glad to be French again, after forty years, that it seemed positively to enjoy the German shells. The inhabitants of Pont-à-Mousson—who are known by the picturesque name of Mussipontins—lived as though shells bursting in their peaceful town were incidents to which they had been accustomed since their birth.

Pont-à-Mousson had adapted all its habits and customs to the conditions of war. In days of peace its principal square was a placid little place surrounded by arcades, with the inevitable tobacco shop, café, and chemist, which always take the most prominent positions in a French provincial town. When I visited it

last, its appearance had completely changed. The visitor who arrived in the square could see nothing suggesting commerce. He appeared to have arrived in the centre of just such a fortification as in our youth the illustrated books on the Crimean war familiarised us with. The arches of the arcade had been filled with sandbags piled many deep until they reached the summit of the pillars. To reach the pavement through the arches one had to squeeze one's way through a narrow zigzag entrance between the sandbag walls. Once inside the arcade, one found one's chemist, tobacconist, and café. "Business as usual" was certainly a Pont-à-Mousson motto. In case of bombardment the Mussipontins could stroll about their square in perfect safety. German shells could not prevent them from taking their *apéritif* at their café or buying their packet of cigarettes. The sandbags provided an impenetrable defence against the splinters of shells that might burst in the square.

On the day of my visit all was calm in Pont-à-Mousson ; that is to say, no shells were actually falling. There had been a heavy bombardment the day before, and there would probably be a heavy bombardment the day after, but the main thing was that it was no longer raining. In fact, the sun was actually shining, and people were far more pleased at the change in the weather than they were at their temporary respite from German shells. I wrote an article in a little café that once looked out on the square and now had as its only prospect a solid wall of sandbags wedged tightly between the arches of the arcade. There were eight or ten customers taking the usual drinks and paying the

usual prices. Two grizzled men, certainly over fifty years of age, and from their appearance agriculturists, were having an animated conversation as to the price they were getting for their milk. One of them explained at great length an ingenious scheme that he had for carrying his produce to Nancy, the principal town of the district, and he expressed with great disgust his annoyance at having arrived at Nancy, some months previously, on the very night that it was being bombarded by a long range German gun. "I slept at Nancy that night," he said; "but after that I had had enough of it. I just came back to Pont-à-Mousson for peace!"

As Pont-à-Mousson was then just 1,500 yards from the Germans, it was scarcely the place where one would hope to find tranquillity. Field guns could bombard it at their ease, while Nancy had only to fear the longest range guns that modern science has contrived. The essential difference was that in Pont-à-Mousson people expected shells, and that in Nancy they were regarded as a quite unexpected annoyance. The proprietor of the café was surprised when I asked him if they had recently been bombarded. "We are bombarded every day," he said, "though just lately things have been pretty quiet, and since yesterday evening we have not had a shell. But still, if you stay a day or two at Pont-à-Mousson, something interesting is sure to happen."

His beer was excellent. Nancy beer has the reputation of being the best in France, and this café was not a little proud at having an unfailing supply of the best beer in Nancy. The only time that the supply failed was when a purely haphazard German shell fell right

into the middle of a dray loaded with beer-bottles. Neither horse nor driver was hurt, but not a beer-bottle escaped, and for twenty-four hours there was no beer in Pont-à-Mousson.

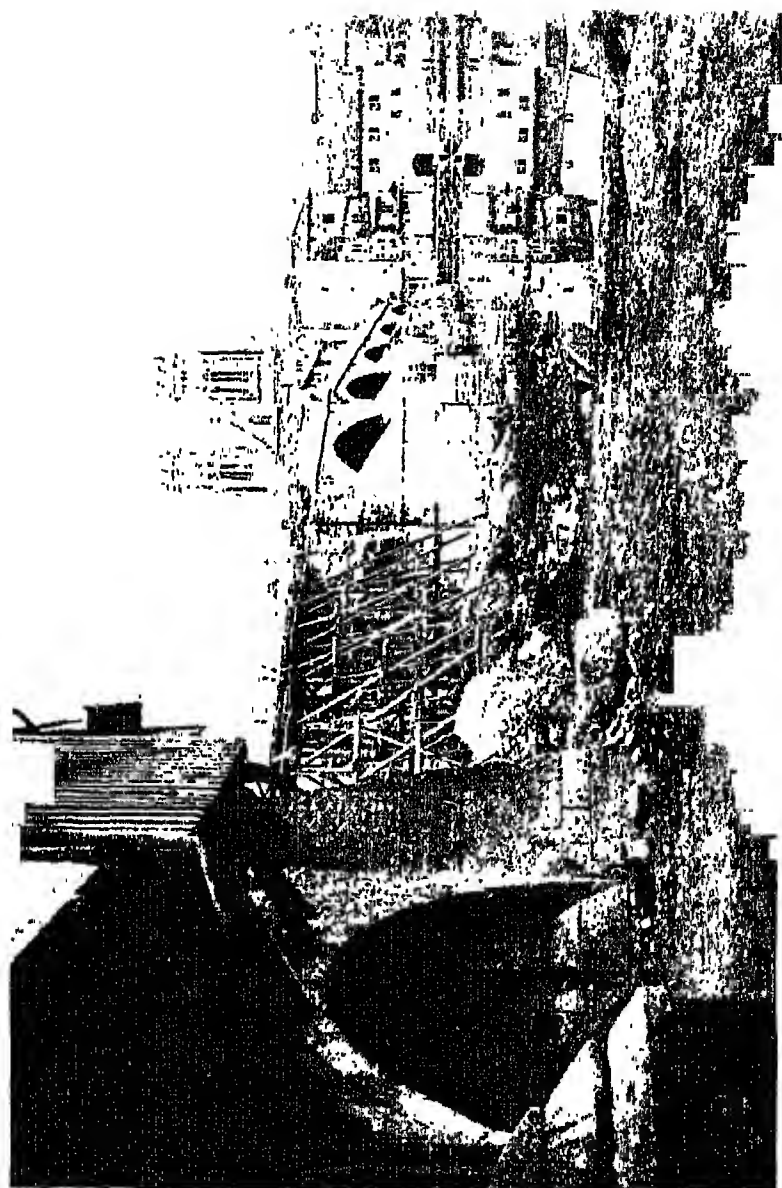
Certainly the town was well supplied with all provisions. The fruit-shops, not only in the protected square, but also in the streets that were open to shell splinters, had a magnificent show both of vegetables and cherries, strawberries and peaches, which must certainly have come from the south, and of groceries and meat there was no lack. Yet there was scarcely a house in Pont-à-Mousson that had not been struck by a shell. On the side away from the enemy the façade might be intact, but the interior was a mass of ruins. The Mussipontins, however, regulated their lives accordingly, and it must be said that, apart from the ever-present danger of sudden death, they were not too uncomfortable. It is a curious fact that I have noted throughout the bombarded districts that the certainty that each shell which drops in a French town will call forth at least one corresponding shell or aeroplane bomb which will drop among the German cantonments, causing damage of real military importance, instead of merely killing a few harmless civilians, produces an extremely soothing effect on the population submitted to this form of German *Kultur*.

The supplies of Pont-à-Mousson were brought up along screened roads. It would probably amaze the enemy to know how excellent these roads were, despite all efforts to destroy them. His shells had torn up meadows and waste ground wholesale, but to drop a projectile on a road, however broad it may be, needs a

combination of skill and luck which had so far never been the enemy's lot. The Germans contented themselves with bombarding empty factories and destroying what had been already ruined.

At the time Pont-à-Mousson was a pleasant spot to wander in. Apart from a distant cannonade, there was no noise, and the streets were quiet and lonely. The inhabitants of the town, men, women, and children, were sitting outside their doors enjoying the sun, the women knitting, the men gossiping, and the children playing. Pont-à-Mousson was clearly visible to the enemy from both banks of the Moselle, which cuts it asunder, and from the precautions which were taken to conceal all movement from German view one easily gained the impression that it was entirely surrounded.

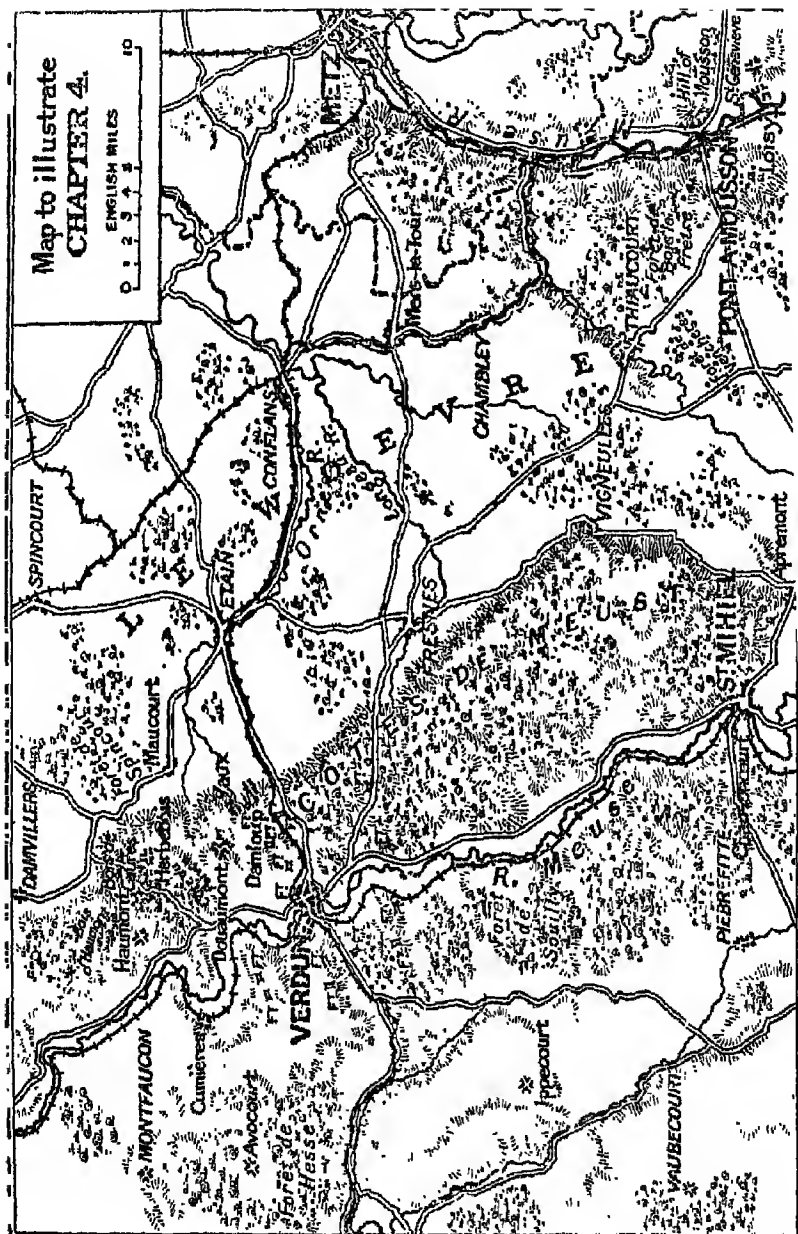
Inside the town there was a point where one could view at one's ease the German lines. One saw them as a maze of brown lines on the hillside, and they seemed scarcely more important than the earthworks thrown up by a diligent ants' nest. Before the Marne the enemy held Pont-à-Mousson for five brief days. The bridge across the Moselle, which connects the two parts of the town, had been blown up by the French, and the Germans set to work to repair it by constructing a wooden gangway between the two piers. Despite all the efforts of the enemy, the connection between the two banks was still maintained, though of course the really important bridges were well out of the range of the German guns. Across the Pont-à-Mousson gangway not more than two persons were allowed to pass at the same time, as any larger number might prove too tempting to the German gunners. On the right bank



the town had suffered more severely even than on the left, and many houses had been completely destroyed. But among the ruins life went on as it always had, and no human power could depress or conquer the heroic Mussipontins.

Map to illustrate CHAPTER 4.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
ENGLISH MILES



CHAPTER IV

VERDUN

A WHITE line in the hillside below one's feet—the advanced French trenches on the heights of the Meuse ; in the valley below a grey ruined village—Chauvonnecourt—in German hands ; then the grey stream of the Meuse, the houses of St. Mihiel, half hidden in the mist, and beyond another white line of French trenches cutting through the plain, a narrow wedge of Germans squeezed tight between two solid lines of French trenches. It is the apex of the sharply pointed triangle driven by the Germans into the French line between Verdun and Nancy—the famous salient of St. Mihiel.

From the spectator's point of view the position has the great advantage of being entirely overlooked by the heights on the west bank of the Meuse, and a casual glance is enough to convince the merest novice of the extraordinary defensive power of a salient, even under the most disadvantageous conditions, in the circumstances of modern warfare. The apex of the St. Mihiel triangle is a large ruined farm, called Mont Meuse, on the right bank of the river. At this point the opposing lines are only about 100 yards apart. The whole of the low ground near the river is commanded by the heights of Les Paroches, on which there is a fort which the Germans were bombarding vigorously on the day of our visit. Chauvonnecourt, on the left bank of

the river, opposite St. Mihiel, was merely a bridge-head, and the whole of its defences were exposed to the fire of the French guns posted on the heights of the Meuse, and also to a cross-fire from the lines which ran north-east on the other side of the river. Yet the Germans have shown that determined men, well dug in, can hold almost any position, provided that the enemy does not consider it of such vital importance as to justify him in sweeping its defences away with a tremendous artillery preparation.

It was during the famous "race to the sea," in September, 1914, that the Germans succeeded in establishing themselves at St. Mihiel. The French right had been weakened by the departure of the 20th Army Corps, under General de Castelnau, to take up its position on the extreme left, and the Germans seized the opportunity to strike a blow which was aimed not only at cutting the railway between Verdun and Nancy, but also at the investment of the fortress itself. Their initial success in reaching St. Mihiel filled them with triumph, and their strategists counted at once on the Crown Prince's army sweeping round through the Argonne and joining with the German army operating on the Meuse. Events, however, have proved how exaggerated were their hopes. They cut the direct railway line between Verdun and Nancy, and this was the utmost limit of their success.

The Crown Prince for nearly two years tried in vain to break through the French line between St. Mihiel and Verdun, and did not succeed in attaining a single objective of either strategical or tactical importance. The day came when the Germans staked their all on the capture of Verdun, but their attempt was not made

from the St. Mihiel side. The famous salient played no part in the battle, except in so far as the cutting of the Verdun-Nancy railway interfered with the French communications, and it was across the difficult country to the north of the fortress that the enemy attempted to advance. At St. Mihiel the Germans found themselves face to face with the natural barrier of the heights of the Meuse, and their triumph was reduced to the empty satisfaction of maintaining themselves in what appeared to be an impossible position.

There are many large woods on the Meuse heights, mostly oak, with thick undergrowth, which provides admirable cover for troops. It was through these woods that the approach to the French lines overlooking St. Mihiel lay. Our motor-cars followed a steep and winding road up to some cantonments which the French soldiers called a "native village," in the centre of the forest. This village consisted of a number of little huts, picturesquely built of pine trunks and originally designed by the African regiments that were formerly stationed there. From this point a make-shift tramway led through the undergrowth to the front line trenches, a distance which was covered in about three-quarters of an hour.

The tramcar was practical, if not luxurious. It consisted simply of a sideless open truck with a plank seat, and for the first part of the journey it depended for its motive power on four artillery horses, which splashed along through the mud and slipped over the sleepers as best they could. There was no small traffic along the line, for all supplies were brought up by it. Not infrequently it was blocked by trucks which had unfortunately jumped the points at the crossing places.

The Germans knew of its existence and often hunted for it with their shells, but it was well screened by the woods, and firing shells at random into wooded country is a less profitable occupation than the proverbial one of looking for a needle in a haystack.

Often the tramcar ran off the lines, and then the passengers and the two men in charge of the brakes had to get down into the deep mud and replace it on the rails. The real charm of this tramway, however, was only realised when the half-way point was reached. Here the horses were removed ; for the rest of the way the line ran downhill, and they were replaced by the force of gravity. Then there was much shouting between the two men at the brakes, and probably some discussion as to who was to get down into the mud and slime and give the starting push. Finally, with many jolts and a good deal of squeaking, the tramcar started away merrily down the hill and, provided there was no accident, arrived triumphantly behind the first line of trenches in about ten minutes.

The French trenches in this section appeared to be extremely well kept, and had comparatively little mud. The General in command was a rigid disciplinarian, and he had a way of visiting with the greatest regularity every yard of trench near the enemy. Sometimes he would call up the men responsible for a particular section and say : " I got my feet wet to-day in your trench. Don't let that occur again ! " A very few minutes later fatigue parties would be busy removing every trace of mud from the offending trench.

The General made a remark that I have often heard elsewhere on the front. " It is surprising," he said, " what a fuss the Germans kick up when they are

being fired upon. Our men simply sit tight and stay quiet, while the Germans shout and scream as though we were taking an unfair advantage in hitting them at all ! ” The case is the same with the German wounded, who as a rule are far less stoical than the French. This Teuton characteristic is apparent in the extraordinary bitterness with which the Germans complain to neutral Powers about every blow they have suffered at the hands of our navy, while they appear to be genuinely convinced that their own exploits in sinking harmless merchant ships are highly meritorious and above all criticism.

The precautions that were taken against asphyxiating gas in this section were of a most complete character. Every man had his mask, and was bound always to have it with him. The colonel in charge made it a rule to call upon every man whom he passed in the trenches to show his mask, and woe betide the man who had forgotten it ! As a matter of fact, on the heights of the Meuse there was comparatively little danger from this form of German *Kultur*. The men had been carefully trained in everything that should be done in such circumstances, and were confident that they could meet successfully any attack of this kind. As soon as they were given their masks they were ordered to put them on and test them by going into a room which had been filled with poison gas. At first the men were a little alarmed at the prospect and went in rather reluctantly, but after a minute or two they discovered that their masks were perfectly gas-proof, and after that they spent their time in playing jokes on one another and trying to sing through their respirators.

Fighting in this district at the time of my visit was

very difficult, as the Meuse had flooded the low-lying lands in the valley, and there was quite an expanse of marshy ground over which it was impossible to pass. None the less deserters succeeded in some mysterious way in making their way into the French lines. Among them some Russian prisoners, who were being used by the Germans as navvies and were employed on works just behind the front trenches, were successful in escaping and, after many adventures and much fatigue, crept through the French barbed wire entanglements. Fortunately they were able to convince the sentries that they were Russians, though before their arrival no one in the trenches had any idea that there were any Russians within hundreds of miles.

Verdun lies some twenty-five miles north of St. Mihiel. At the end of January, 1916, it was a typical fortress town in time of war. The shops in the Rue Mazel were full of expensive things such as tempt the soldier's heart. There was abundance of everything, and everything was very dear. In the trenches a man has no opportunity of spending, and money accumulates ; when his turn comes to go to the rear for a short rest, he wants the best that money can buy, and worries not at all about the price. So the townspeople of Verdun were very busy amassing fortunes, and though they were occasionally bombarded by a fifteen-inch gun and by aeroplane bombs, they would have been utterly amazed and incredulous if any prophet had told them that within a month the Rue Mazel would be as empty as a desert, with every shop closed, and that scarcely a civilian would be left within their shell-torn town.

At the *apéritif* hour on January 20th I went to one of

the principal cafés of Verdun. It was packed with men, and one's first impression was that floor, chairs, tables, and everything were painted blue in every possible shade, from a muddy blue verging on khaki to the bright blue of the sky on a summer day. This impression was produced by the all-pervading blue uniforms which occupied every square inch of space available. There were men fresh from the trenches, thick with mud from head to foot ; even their trench helmets had a thick coating of mud upon them. Mud, indeed, with the blue of the *capote* faintly showing through, had become a recognised uniform, and men who had snatched a few hours from the trenches did not trouble to brush it off when they came into the glaring lights of a café, for the simple reason that they knew they would be in the mud again a few hours later.

It could not be said that the café had much to offer in the way of variety. Alcohol in the French sense—that is, spirits of all kinds, liqueurs, vermouths, and the like—had been sternly suppressed by military law, and the place of such drinks had been taken by what are known as *boissons hygiéniques*. A man could have his choice between beer, wine, Madeira, and port, which do not come under the French heading of "alcohol," and beer and port were decidedly the favourites. The port had a curious taste, and one might well feel sceptical as to whether it had ever seen the shores of Portugal. But it had one great advantage : it was served in champagne glasses, and this honour seemed to give it a flavour which its grapes could never have bestowed.

There were no waiters, since all the men of military age had long ago been mobilised, and several waitresses had to work very hard to supply the needs of some

hundreds of thirsty men. The Frenchman is always temperate, but his sobriety is no handicap to his gaiety, and there was as much laughing and joking over a single glass of port as there might be in other countries over several bottles of champagne.

That café was a perfect museum of medals. Almost every decoration was represented, from the Médaille Militaire and the Croix de Guerre to the Legion of Honour and those colonial decorations which commemorate many a hard-fought fight in Northern Africa. The Médaille Militaire is the Victoria Cross of France. It can only be won by private soldiers or non-commissioned officers, with the single exception of generals who have commanded in chief against the enemy. There is something Napoleonic in this idea of a medal that is shared exclusively between a commander-in-chief and the lowest ranks of the army.

The Croix de Guerre has come into existence in this war. On its ground of green and red ribbon each mention in army orders is denoted by a palm, while mention in the orders of an army corps, division, or brigade, is shown by a silver-gilt, silver, or bronze star. In these honorific distinctions the aviator is specially favoured, since he fights for his own hand and wins individual distinction to a more conspicuous extent than the officers and men of the other arms. Fourteen palms on the ribbon of the Croix de Guerre seem so far to be the record, though it is one that may very well be surpassed before hostilities are at an end.

The soldier from the trenches is as fond of games as he is in civil life. Backgammon and bridge occupied a number of tables in this Verdun café, while elsewhere two officers were engaged in a desperate game of

picquet, that was somewhat interfered with by the advice and exhortations of half a dozen other officers. Every now and then a man would shout across the café in tones of astonishment and pleasure at perceiving a friend whom perhaps he had not seen since the war began. For this café was a famous meeting place, and during the present war civilians suddenly converted into soldiers have for a long time lost sight of friends whom they used to meet regularly in their favourite café.

It was only after being for some minutes in the café that one discovered that there really were a few men in dull civilian clothes, half hidden among the uniforms. They were old men, *habitués* of the café, who had probably played their games of cards at the same table for years and years past. They could not allow their habits to be interfered with by so trifling an incident as a European war. They were all well-known characters and discussed strategical questions with the soldiers with a more than military assumption of authority. Among the soldiers themselves military "shop" played an important part. War at the present moment is an absorbing profession, and there was much discussion concerning such subjects as trench guns and grenades, the merits of the *Minenwerfer*, and the best way of striking home with the trench knife or the bayonet.

That night there was a great celebration in honour of a young officer who had just received the Croix de Guerre. The hotel behind the café had prepared a sumptuous dinner. Songs were sung and the merriment was kept up till the last moment allowed by the strict military law concerning closing time. There was

a certain simplicity and directness about their rejoicings. Affectations have disappeared before the reality of war and its primitive conditions. The same amusements were shared by all classes of society alike. I was sitting at a table with two private soldiers, chauffeurs for the time being. One of them drove his own sixty-horse-power motor-car, while the other owned a magnificent house in the Avenue du Bois. At the next table there was a lieutenant wearing the Médaille Militaire, a proof that he had been promoted from the ranks. Of course they saluted him with the respect due to an officer. In civil life he had been their fencing master.

The following morning we visited one of the Verdun forts, and so little presentiment had we of the future that we were inclined to grumble at wasting our time in inspecting anything so out of date as a fort, when there were trenches far nearer to the enemy's line to be seen. We could not guess that in a few weeks the Verdun forts were to become household words throughout the world, and that the defence of Douaumont and Vaux was to count among the most heroic deeds of the war.

The Verdun forts are long, low buildings, their brick-work entrances facing the city and their sloping outer walls turfed, so that they run down imperceptibly into the hillside. The exigencies of modern warfare had turned them from the sole defences of the fortress into centres of resistance on dominating points, forming part and parcel of the trench system. They are approached through broad fields of barbed wire, and in the glacis they command lines of trenches have been dug, while every inch of ground below them and between them is swept by the flanking fire of concealed machine-guns.

Once past the sentry and the entrance gate, we dived into a deep corridor. The enormous masses of reinforced concrete that formed the roof persuaded one that no shell, however huge, could tear them asunder. A gallery to the left led to a dark room, where the men of the garrison slept. In those days they had but one complaint—the appalling monotony of being shut up underground, with nothing ever happening. The corridor narrowed down to a tiny passage, with just room for one man abreast between its massive concrete walls, and a sharp right-angled corner round which no shell splinter could pass led out to a terrace on the fortifications. From the terrace there was an extended view over the Woevre, that great marshy plain which was once a sea and which held the record of the whole line for trench mud.

After the fall of the Belgian forts and Maubeuge before the German heavy guns the greater part of the artillery in these Verdun forts was dismounted and removed to positions which the enemy could not immediately locate. When I was there, however, there remained a certain number of guns. They were disappearing guns, mounted in turrets. The summits of the turrets emerged like ventilators just level with the slopes of the fort, and when the gun had been laid, and all was ready for firing, the cupola of the turret rose a little, and the nose of the gun shot out, only to vanish again as soon as the shot had been fired. Down below, under many feet of concrete, where the guns were loaded and trained, the scene closely resembled that of a battleship turret.

At Douaumont and Vaux the German artillery battered to pieces the huge concrete walls which seemed

to be capable of defying an earthquake. The corridors below were filled up with great blocks of masonry fallen from the roof, and among the ruins the French fought on until exhaustion and superior numbers overpowered them. Many fantastic accounts of the defence of Fort Vaux were published in the British press, and the following narrative has the advantage of being absolutely authentic :—

“ The Germans knew they could not carry Fort Vaux by assault, any more than they had been able to carry Douaumont in this way, and consequently they turned all their efforts to its investment. What their infantry had been powerless to realise they accomplished by their artillery. On the north of the fort, on its right and on its left, they pushed forward detachments, and then on the southern side they isolated the fort with a curtain of fire such as had never before been seen.

“ It was estimated that from March until the fall of the fort early in June the Germans never fired less than 8,000 shells a day on the fort and its immediate neighbourhood, and this figure increased enormously during the last few days of the bombardment. The fort itself was completely demolished by the explosions. Its ordinary entrance gate was blocked. For a long time the only possible exit was the north-western postern, through which, despite all difficulties, supplies were brought up and communications maintained.

“ In this hell-hole, under the explosions of huge projectiles which by their shock numbed and stupefied men's brains, a little garrison, under Major Raynal, continued to resist. Round the fort all work was impossible. Trenches were demolished while they

were being dug. A man had to wait for hours and choose his moment if he was to have the slightest chance of passing.

" On June 1st the Germans began a terrific attack, and under the violence of their fire certain elements of the French advanced line retired. A few of the men, who had been slightly wounded and were seeking for some shelter against the rain of shell, made their way into the ruins of the fort, and were an embarrassment to the garrison rather than a reinforcement.

" On June 2nd the German advance made it impossible to use the north-western postern. Henceforth the fort was deprived of communication with the French lines. Since it was impossible for despatch-bearers to get through, an attempt was made to communicate by signals. Signallers were posted at a window to communicate with other signallers just over a mile away. But the scheme did not work satisfactorily: Vaux could not see the signals distinctly. A volunteer came forward to carry the news through the zone of death, and managed to escape the German fire, though not a movement passed undetected by the enemy. The position of the signallers was changed, and he returned to his post in the fort, his object accomplished.

" A young officer named Besset succeeded in leaving the fort with a report, and then went back to encourage his comrades, whom he refused to desert. A private in the 124th Division, a stretcher-bearer named Vanier, worked unflinchingly among the wounded, hiding them among the ruins and bandaging their wounds. When he had no wounded to tend, he went out to fetch water, for water was the most serious problem of all.

" Throughout the battle of Verdun thirst was one of the most terrible trials to which the soldiers were submitted. Letters captured on German prisoners continually referred to it, and the French could not escape a hardship that was common to both parties. Troops were continually isolated by curtains of shells fired on a narrow front, making all movement impossible. Darkness was the only protection, but in June the nights are short, and flares and rockets were continually blazing. Isolated men succeeded in passing, but at terrible risks, with a tiny supply of water. But the task of providing 150 men with water, to say nothing of 400 more who had taken refuge in the fort, was beyond human power. From outside attempts were made to send water into the fort, but not one was successful.

" Yet the fort held—and held for four days more.

" The enemy advanced on the higher ground, but the French organised the ruins of the buildings inside the fort. At every window, at every opening behind the débris of a wall, machine-guns were placed, picked shots took cover, and every German who reached the courtyard of the fort was shot down. Barricades were raised at every corner, and piles of German corpses lay before them.

" The struggle continued under these extraordinary conditions. The Germans tried the experiment of letting down at the end of a cord baskets full of grenades, and when these baskets were on a level with the windows held by the French, they dropped into them a grenade with a time fuse and swung them in through the opening, to explode inside. But still the garrison fought on.

" There is a limit to human endurance. The last message sent by Major Raynal ran as follows :

" ' We are near the end. Officers and soldiers have done their whole duty. *Vive la France !* ' "

June 6th was the final day. In the morning Vanier, with a few wounded who were determined not to be taken alive, escaped through a grating. Several of them were killed, but the rest crawled towards the French lines. Those who won through were full of joy. When his colonel congratulated him, Vanier, who already held the Médaille Militaire and the Croix de Guerre with two palms, replied : ' *Mon colonel*, I had rather be killed than be taken by the Boches ! ' "

" This was the last definite news received concerning the fort of Vaux. On June 6th the French aeroplanes observed thick columns of smoke and explosions in what was once the fort. On the 7th the Germans announced that they had carried the whole fort, and made a certain number of unwounded prisoners. In truth, they found only a few exhausted men, lying in ruins that were no longer tenable."

In January life in Verdun was rather feverish and hurried, as it was in all towns some miles behind the lines ; in other respects it was absolutely normal. Six weeks later, early in March, I visited Verdun again, in the middle of the first phase of the great battle, and the change in the town was one of those miracles which it needed the present war to reduce to a commonplace event. On the occasion of my previous visit Verdun had been several times bombarded. Houses had been destroyed by big shells, but the Germans had discovered that this kind of bombardment cost more

than it was worth, and consequently the inhabitants lived, after several months' tranquillity, in confidence and a feeling of security. The shopkeepers were doing a roaring trade, as the town was necessarily crammed with troops, and there were shops selling expensive luxuries that one would never expect to find in a provincial town.

At the time of my second visit Verdun was not crowded. Not a shop was open. It could muster three civilians, and all three of them were rightly proud of their courage in staying in the bombarded town. As we came into the town, the first civilians who had reached Verdun since its evacuation by the non-military population—Mr. Elmer Roberts, of the Associated Press of the United States, and myself, with Captain Semenoff, who was representing the Russian press—the air was trembling with the noise of the battle that was raging round Douaumont. Even some five miles away the noise of the German artillery was deafening. For minutes together it was an absolutely continuous crash upon crash and bang upon bang, huge German shells bursting in and all round the town and the French guns answering from every slope. Silence seemed an impossible ideal. Yet even outside the town, from time to time, there would come a silence of perhaps thirty seconds, and it was more nerve-racking than the eternal boom of bursting German shells and the trembling of the earth beneath the reply of the French artillery. During these silences one was waiting in tense expectation for the infernal din to break loose again.

In the town, however, where several German shells were falling every minute, there was comparative

peace. Houses muffle sound to a surprising extent, and in some of the small winding streets of Verdun one could fancy that the explosions that were destroying houses a few hundred yards away were merely distant artillery practice.

Verdun was dead and silent, except for the crashing of the big shells and the sound of splinters falling on the roofs. All the goods the shopkeepers had collected as specially calculated to appeal to the soldier in the trenches had disappeared, and if, when one walked down the Rue Mazel, one's course was frequently interrupted, it was not by the desire of inspecting a tempting shop window. There would come a rush of wings in the air, and instinctively one made for the nearest doorway, ducking as one went. Then there was a big explosion, and one went on.

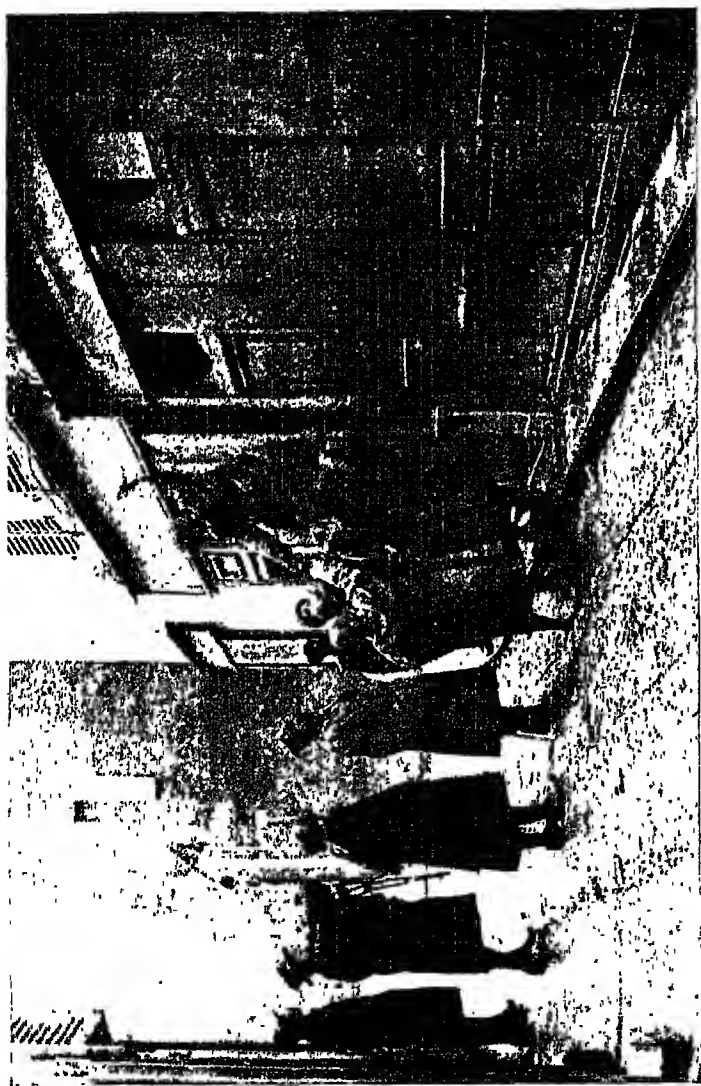
It was in the Rue Mazel that I met one of the three civilians still left in Verdun. He was contemplating the view from his door with a contented smile, and looked at me with supreme contempt when I scuttled for cover at a particularly loud explosion. "You are taking refuge on the wrong side of the road," he remarked mildly. "The left is the side to escape from splinters, since that is the side from which the Boches are firing. Anyhow, it is of no use ducking, since by the time you have heard the shell the danger is over."

The Gallant Cock, the hotel at which I had stayed before, was still in existence, but its annexe, just opposite, had been reduced to matchwood by a twelve-inch shell. As for the neighbouring café, it had received a very large collection of shell splinters, which had twisted its iron shutters into the most fantastic

shapes. No doubt the owner of the café had already made his fortune, but I am inclined to think that he will have to spend quite a lot of money on his premises before he can open them again.

The first objective of visitors to a bombarded town is invariably the cathedral, since the Germans have made a habit of the destruction of all things held by art and religion sacrosanct. In Verdun, however, they could not see their target, and consequently so far, beyond an insignificant hole in the roof and the breaking of all its glass, the cathedral was intact. As we went up the steep, lonely streets towards the cathedral our attention was suddenly attracted by a strange wailing sound, that contrasted quaintly with the continuing roar of exploding shells. It was a kitten mewling plaintively in the front storey of a house. It had obviously been forgotten in the haste of evacuation. The owner of the house had closed up the shutters and never given a thought to the poor beast that was slowly starving to death. A rescue party was at once formed. M. Georges Scott, the well-known artist, who was mobilised as a *chasseur alpin*, mounted on my shoulders and endeavoured to prise open the shutter with a stick. But his efforts were unavailing, and eventually the kitten's life was saved by the firemen of Verdun, who at our request broke into the house.

Several large shells had fallen near the cathedral. One of them had gutted a girls' school, and another had landed fair and square on a shop that sold religious ornaments and emblems. For some unexplained reason, there was a curé's battered hat lying pathetically on the top of the débris, and at the back, against a wall



RESCUING THE KITTEN IN HOMEARDED VERDUN.

that had miraculously escaped destruction, stood a stucco statue of Joan of Arc, which had passed through the storm of fire unscathed.

The pigeons were flying in uneasy circles above the cathedral and seemed to be curiously disturbed by the bombardment. As a general rule birds seem to regard bombardment as a natural cataclysm, to be suffered, since it cannot be prevented.

Despite German shells, the French gendarmes kept a good watch in Verdun. There was no pillaging, and the refugees, who, in their hurry, had left their windows open and doors unlocked, could sleep easy as to the contents of their houses except in so far as an enemy projectile might reduce them to powder. Just near one of the gates there was a house of which the shutters had not been closed, and the window was still open. It seemed that just before the evacuation the owner of that house had some special occasion to celebrate. Looking through the window, one could see a table laid for sixteen persons, and everything prepared for an excellent meal. There was a nice white tablecloth, with napkins folded mitre-shaped for every guest. Decanters of wine, red and white, were standing beside each plate. On the sideboard piles of oranges and apples were waiting for the party that never came to eat them.

"Look at this!" said an officer, pointing through the window. "This shows at any rate that our gendarmes keep good guard even in a bombarded city!" The gendarme who was with us was intensely pleased at this eulogy, and declared that the unfinished meal should remain where it was until the inhabitants of Verdun returned to their houses.

M. Georges Scott remarked to me that this war is the end of the battle painter, since, apart from curiously lucky circumstances, there is absolutely nothing to paint. "Modern warfare," he said, "has nothing to do with colours. It is a symphony in sound. It is subject matter for the musician, not the painter. Perhaps the musician of the future will be able to convert into terms of music the extraordinary contrasts of noise and sudden silence which one may hear in a bombarded town. For the artist, unfortunately, ruins are sordid things, and a demolished house in Arras, Rheims, or Soissons cannot be distinguished from a house equally demolished in Nieuport, Ypres, or Verdun."

We were at that moment waiting for the Germans to allow us to leave Verdun. They had suddenly chosen as a target the gate through which we were about to pass, and several salvoes of big shells fell near the road just before it. In the meantime the cinematographers had been "taking" everything they could find in Verdun, and their only grief was that so far no shell had burst near enough to their apparatus to be photographed.

Verdun was being bombarded that day as it had been for the previous twelve days. The Germans had poured hundreds of tons of high explosives into the town, and it was surprising how little damage all their efforts had done. When a big shell fell on a house it was, of course, reduced to a shapeless wreck, but there were a great many houses in Verdun, and up to that time the destruction was in no way proportionate to the expense incurred by the enemy.

The Germans were devoting their main attention to

the gates, no doubt hoping a lucky shot might fall near enough to a motor lorry to destroy it. We stood for some time under one of the gates built by Vauban. In about five minutes some twenty or thirty six-inch and eight-inch shells exploded with terrific violence within an uncomfortably small radius round that gate. They mowed down large trees, tore big holes in sodden meadows, and rained splinters all about the place, but apart from this they did not do a pennyworth of damage.

The gendarme on duty at the gate, as is often the way of his kind, took a positive pride in the arrival of these shells and, when we all took cover to avoid the splinters, explained the exact calibre of the projectile and the point at which it had exploded. The *insouciance* with which the French soldiers strolled along that shelled road was a marvellous proof of the way in which their nerves had been hardened by custom and contempt of danger. Two mounted men were urged by the gendarme to put on speed as they passed through the zone of fire, and they were quite insulted by the suggestion. The chauffeur of a motor-car condescended to hurry a little, though he regarded with great contempt the two civilians who had taken up what they thought was a safe position under cover of a ruined house.

All over Verdun a shower of steel splinters was falling on the roofs and in the roads with a pattering sound like rain. One splinter broke the glass of our motor-car, and was picked up by our chauffeur as a precious relic.

When one talked with the men who came down to Verdun straight from the firing line, one realised how tremendous must have been the German losses.

Never did French troops fight more magnificently than the men who retired so grimly from the Bois d'Hau-mont, the Bois de Caures, and Herbebois to the line of the Côte du Poivre and Douaumont. They fought to gain time, and gladly gave their lives for this object. Two divisions held up two German army corps for several hours. Every yard of ground yielded was paid for by the enemy a hundred times over.

There was a sergeant who, as his colonel certified from his own certain knowledge, accounted for sixty Boches with rifle bullets. He was the crack shot of his battalion, and when the enemy was advancing he went up outside the trenches and stood there fully exposed to the storm of bullets and shells, while his comrades handed up to him loaded rifle after loaded rifle from below the parapet. By a miracle he was not touched, and after he had accounted for his sixty Boches he fell back with his battalion to the second line. He was recommended for the Croix de Guerre, and few men have earned it better.

The endurance of the French troops during this battle was beyond all praise. After two days and nights of continuous fighting, they still retained their dash and unshakable *moral*. "We are going to stay here," said one of these *poilus* to a staff officer, "until we are killed, and in that way we are sure the reserves will be able to come up in time." I spoke to a wounded man just back from the firing trench. He had lost his right hand, and I consoled with him on his bad luck. "That is nothing!" he replied cheerfully. "I offered my life to France, and she has only taken my hand, so there I gain."

In the utter fatigue of the third day, when, under the

storm of German shells, convoys were few and far between to reach the advanced positions, the men fought on doggedly without food or drink. An artillery captain told me the following story of his battery. In the full height of the assault his guns had been firing round after round at the highest speed. After 700 or 800 rounds the 75's became so hot that it was impossible to fire any longer until the pieces had been cooled. There was no water left except in the men's water-bottles. The men were almost dying of thirst, and yet of their own free will they refused to drink a single drop, reserving all the water in their flasks for the cooling of the pieces which were defending the infantry a mile or two away.

In connection with the battle of Verdun the name of Colonel Driant, deputy for Nancy and patriotic writer, will always be remembered. With his two battalions of picked troops he recovered by a counter-attack the original French positions in the Bois de Caures, but, owing to the withdrawal of the French left, the Germans began to surround him. He divided his men into five columns for the retreat that had become inevitable, and he himself marched in the rear of the last column. Almost all his troops had retired safely from the woods, when the Germans closed round from the left and from the right, nipping the last French column, as it were, between a pair of gigantic pincers. A hundred men or so were cut off, and with these Colonel Driant, who, true to the ancient naval tradition that a captain should be the last man to leave his ship, had chosen for himself the place of danger. He was not captured by the enemy, but died as a patriot should, and the Germans, who at first confused his name with that of the

Premier and believed that he was M. Briand's brother, gave him an honourable burial.

It was at 7 a.m. on February 21st that the great German offensive against Verdun began. Everywhere upon the French line there raged such a storm of huge projectiles as has never before been known in the history of war. Verdun was heavily bombarded, as well as its lines of communications. The enemy was obviously trying to destroy the railway and the bridges across the Meuse. As far as the French front lines were concerned, the whole force of the enemy's artillery was first concentrated upon the Bois d'Haumont. Practically no small calibre guns were used by the Germans, and their main artillery preparation was made by eight- and twelve-inch guns. "They used their twelve-inch guns just as we use our 75's" (three-inch), said a captain to me. He had come through the preliminary bombardment unscathed, and he meant by his phrase that there was a hail of heavy shell upon the French trenches that was comparable only with the *rafale* of the French 75's, which can fire twenty rounds a minute.

The craters made by the shells lost their shape entirely. Instead of being circular, cone-like excavations, they were shapeless, irregular holes, for shell after shell burst within an inch or two of the same spot. The captain, with his colonel, had taken refuge from the storm in an admirably circular crater made by a twelve-inch projectile. Hardly had they got there, when a shell burst on the northern side of the crater, and threw them both over on their stomachs. A second later another shell burst on the southern edge, just as they were struggling to their feet, and threw

them both on their backs. "How we came out alive from that inferno," he said, "is a thing that I shall never understand."

A colonel told me that on a front of 1,000 yards, with a depth of about 500, not less than 80,000 big shells fell within six hours. Small wonder that even officers who had been through the battle of Champagne declared that the French artillery preparation on that occasion was a mere nothing compared with the weight of artillery used by the enemy in the battle of Verdun !

The defensive organisation of the Bois d'Haumont was absolutely shattered, and the concentration of the German artillery was steadily moved towards the French right. First the trenches of the Bois de Caures and then those of the Herbebois were literally swept out of existence. Throughout the assault the Germans followed this plan, concentrating their guns first on the French left and then moving the direction of their fire gradually towards the French right.

The battlefields of to-day have, thanks to modern weapons, a depth that would have been inconceivable to the generals of the past. I visited one of the heights above Verdun, about eight miles from the great battle. The noise of the bombardment was terrific, and the Germans were firing at random all over the country, hoping to find some of the batteries that were causing them such annoyance. It all seemed very far away. Our ears soon became accustomed to the continual noise. Quite at our ease, we watched through the field-glasses the flash of the guns and the bursting of the shells. Near us a concealed French battery was firing incessantly. We were quite a large group, as several officers had joined us, and a party of official cinemato-

graphers. We were duly cinematographed, and I do not think any of us paid much attention to the six-inch German shells that were bursting 500 yards away.

Suddenly there came a whistling noise that grew louder with extreme rapidity. This noise differed essentially from that perpetual sound of mighty rushing winds which was made almost continuously in the air by shells passing far above our heads. The whistle called up vividly before one's eyes something speeding on a parabolic course, and at once roused a very considerable interest as to the point where that parabola was going to meet the earth. Instinctively and shamelessly one looked round for cover and, seeing none, ducked one's head. Fifty yards away on the slopes below a six-inch shell landed with a heavy thud, threw a column of mud into the air, and then was silent. There was no explosion. The ground was soft with the rain, and so the shell failed to burst. The arrival of this shell suggested that somehow or other our group had been spotted by the enemy, and we hastened to scatter. But a glance at the map showed that the enemy could not possibly have seen us. He was merely firing at random, and the next half-dozen shells he sent fell several hundred yards away behind us.

Despite the rain and mist, the hog's-back outline of the Côte du Poivre and the eminence of Douaumont were visible to the naked eye. The distance between these two points was less than a twelfth of the circumference of the hills that surround Verdun, every one of which was a veritable stronghold of trenches and barbed wire. One could only marvel at the enemy's temerity in trying to force his way through the defences on so narrow a front and across such difficult country.

Through glasses one could see the smoke clouds rising from German shells bursting on the Côte du Poivre and the flashes of the French guns nearer to us. Beneath our feet white smoke rose here and there in grey Verdun, showing where a shell had fallen. Little pillars of smoke drifting slowly over a field or wood were evidence that a casual German projectile had burst in vain. The air throbbing with tremendous sound, the earth quivering with unceasing explosions—this was all there was to show that one of the greatest battles of modern times was being waged round Verdun.

The smell of battle was in the air all along the roads leading to Verdun that were so deserted on my first visit in January, six weeks before. There was no longer the comparative tranquillity which used to reign behind the lines, when French and Germans, sitting tight in their own trenches, were trying to wear down the opposing army by a process of exhaustion. Some thousands of motor lorries a day were passing along these roads. To them must be added guns, caissons, and horse-drawn commissariat carts of every description, though they had to follow devious routes and were not allowed on the main road between Verdun and Bar-le-Duc. Yet everything passed swiftly along, and the roads were scarcely ever blocked. Motor vans loaded with men trundled along, each five yards behind the other, and it was amazing how few break-downs there were. I noticed one big lorry that had taken a dive down a three-foot bank into a field, where it lay helplessly, wheels in the air, like some wounded monster. The few motor-cars of the touring type that lost wheels or otherwise came to grief were

promptly taken in tow by one of the passing lorries, so that everywhere the road was free.

Long before the assault the French high command was well aware that the line of communication by railway between Verdun and Ste. Ménéhould through the Argonne would, in case of an attack, be cut by the German artillery. There was another railway, the light railway of the Meuse, but it was clear that in case of emergency its services would need to be supplemented by a transport system capable of giving the greatest results with the smallest waste of time. For this purpose the general staff decided to organise a system of automobile transport. The Verdun-Bar-le-Duc road was reserved for motor traction, and on an average 1,700 lorries passed each day in either direction, an average of one lorry every twenty-five seconds. Despite their continual passage and the very unfavourable weather conditions—snow, frost, and deep mud—traffic went on uninterruptedly and with the utmost regularity.

Not a little of the success of the motor organisation is to be attributed to the splendid work done by the men working on the roads. Theirs was no light or pleasant job. Covered with mud from head to foot, wielding pickaxes or spades or laden with stones, they dashed in between the rapidly running lorries and worked like madmen for the few seconds in which the road was clear. Nothing was more striking than the conscientious way in which they performed their duties, and no one who saw them could doubt but that they understood all the importance of the service which they were called upon to render, and that they, in their own way, were fighting as untiringly and as

bravely as the men in the trenches some few miles away.

Every now and then one would fall upon an artillery column bound for the front. Guns of every kind and description—evil-looking little 75's, long, graceful five-inch guns, and squat, murderous-looking eight-inch howitzers—were to be counted in tens and twenties, and there were such stocks of ammunition as passed all belief. By the side of a mountain of big shells, piled evenly one above the other, rows of ammunition waggons were standing, their horses breathing hard after their journey from the front. Speedily, like clock-work, the waggons were loaded up and dashed back again to provide the gunners with fresh means of destruction.

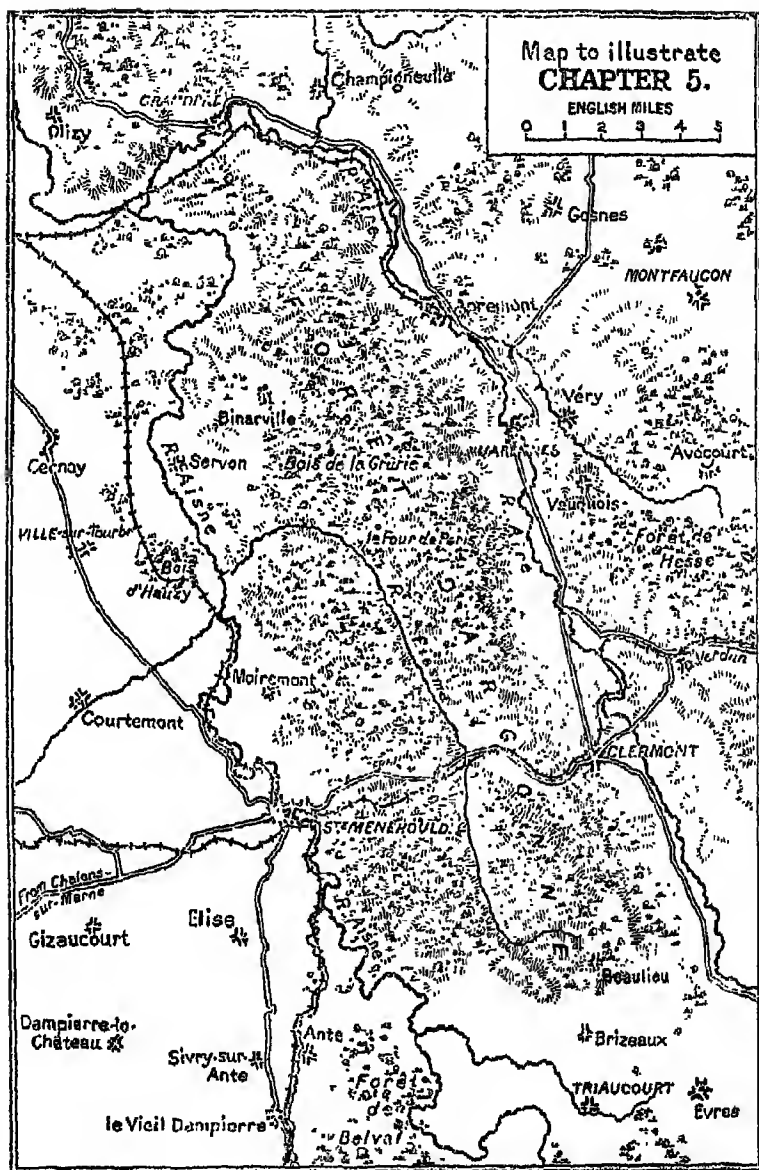
A revictualling station on a strategical railway offers an extraordinary sight during a great battle. Train upon train comes puffing in, loaded with the strangest medley of materials, fodder, petrol, barbed wire, provisions, guns, ammunition, in fact everything that the complications of modern war demand. At the station which I visited all the men were in a state of great joy and satisfaction. They had just heard that Navarre had brought down his sixth German aeroplane, the second within two days. Throughout the battle of Verdun the Germans had been handicapped by the difficulty with which aerial reconnaissance had met, and Navarre's brilliant skill and courage had accomplished more than a little in deterring them from sending up their aviators. The men working behind the lines had good cause to be grateful to the French aviator's prowess, for the German aeroplane was their particular foe. They knew that, once they had been

sighted by an enemy aeroplane, they might expect a hail of shells to be dropped very shortly after just at the spot where they were working.

Headquarters in that district were stationed in an unlovely village. The roads were deep with mud, and the air, too, was full of it, thanks to the splashing of the motor-cars as they passed. Food there was in abundance, but comfort there was none. Every officer under the rank of captain had to sleep on straw, but no one minded. Comfort was replaced by something far more essential—confidence. A little ripple of satisfaction ran across the bodies of blue-coated men grouped in the streets when General Pétain, with his alert step and all-seeing eye, passed across the road. Every soldier within fifty miles of Verdun believed in Pétain, worshipped his strategical powers, and was prepared, under his command, to achieve the impossible.

A minute or two later, perhaps, the tall figure of General Herr, the great artilleryman, moved swiftly and silently towards his quarters. He has studied modern warfare in all its aspects, and he followed personally the Balkan campaigns. It was he who organised the review of *poilus* Mr. Kipling has described in his "France at War." "That review," the General told me, "was perfectly appalling from many points of view. The men were bearded and dirty; their uniforms were muddied and tattered. They had a miserable band, in which practically every instrument had a bullet-hole in it. And yet," he added, "nothing in my life has ever moved me so greatly as to see those lines of infantry, who had been fighting doggedly for weeks in the trenches, sweeping over the crest of the hill with a momentum that nothing German could stop."

It is perhaps at night that the pomp of the preparation of modern war is most striking. Everything is in shades of green. Under the motor headlights the pale blue uniforms of the men marching up to relieve their comrades in the firing line take on a pale greenish tinge. Of a darker green are the endless lorries, one behind the other, that, puffing and snorting, vanish mysteriously into the darkness. In the background the ruined villages of the Marne, broken walls, shattered houses, and barns gutted by fire, outlined against the dark green sky, gave vivid evidence of the horrors which the men in front of Verdun were warding off from France.



CHAPTER V

THE ARGONNE

THE Argonne forest lies some fifteen miles west of Verdun. It is from the military point of view notoriously difficult ground. The forest is, as it were, a backbone, running north and south, and for military purposes it is bounded by Ste. Ménéhould on the west and by Clermont-en-Argonne on the east. The backbone itself is marked by the road which is known as the Haute Chevauchée, continued by the Chemin des Romains. From this crest there runs down like ribs, both east and west, a series of abrupt and deep ravines, on the west towards the valley of the Biesme and on the east towards the valley of the Aire.

Not so many months ago this country was regarded as absolutely impossible for an invader. Trenches were difficult to dig, since water was very near the surface, and it was believed that the thickness of the undergrowth and the broken nature of the ground were sufficient to prevent any advance on the part of the enemy. Consequently there were practically no barbed wire entanglements, no continuous system of trenches except in the advanced lines, and no shelters dug deep in the rock to protect the defenders from bombardment. Modern warfare, however, has shown that natural difficulties, if they are not supplemented by artificial defences, are insufficient as a barrier.

The French front from the North Sea to Switzerland was so strongly fortified, thanks to science and the

military engineers, that the Argonne forest, with all its thickets and ravines and natural cover, appeared to the German high command easier of assault than the plains of Flanders and the bare rolling hills of Champagne. The result was that it was here that the Crown Prince's army made one of the greatest German offensive efforts that had been made during the war up to the time of the attack on Verdun. The valour of the French troops took the place of barbed wire and earthworks, and such insignificant advance as the enemy could make was dearly paid for.

But the lesson was not lost upon the French, and after the German offensive at the end of the summer of 1915 they worked hard to convert the Argonne forest into an impregnable fortress, for which it seems to have been expressly designed by nature. After that date there was a change of generals, and new ideas, based on experience, were given their full effect. There was a school which declared that barbed wire entanglements were prejudicial from the point of view of the offensive, since they made it difficult for the infantry to advance from the trenches. But to-day it is admitted that without barbed wire and that organised system of trenches which has taken the place of the castles and fortresses of the past no troops can hope for success, whether they are standing on the defensive or gathering their forces to attack the enemy.

As the result of these steps no part of the French line was more highly organised than the defences of the Argonne. From the nature of the ground continuous trenches were impossible and undesirable. The system adopted was that of a series of centres of resistance, mutually interdependent. Wherever there

was a hill there was a fortress. On the higher hills there were built citadels that commanded the lower eminences, every one of which was fortified. Before each earthwork miles and miles of barbed wire were set, and woe betide the enemy that attempted an infantry charge blindly through the brushwood! Suddenly, after fighting his way through the trees and brambles, he would find a dip in the ground bristling with concealed barbed wire, across which no troops in the world could hope to pass.

The fortresses themselves, behind their barbed wire defences, differed not at all from a mediæval castle, except for one thing—the walls of a castle were raised many feet above the ground; the walls of the modern fortress were buried many feet below the soil.

It came as a surprise to visit one of these earthworks on an important hill and suddenly to discover that it was surrounded by a moat. The main gate to the fortress was provided with a drawbridge across the moat, which was filled, not with water, but with a bristling array of *chevaux de frise* that boded ill for the unhappy Germans who fell upon their points. The moat was carefully concealed, so that a charging mass of men, convinced that they could reach the trenches in front of them, would suddenly disappear down a drop of many feet, to be slain at their adversary's good pleasure.

The drawbridge worked on the mediæval principle. Thanks to a cunning system of weights, it could be raised by a touch of a hand in a few seconds' time. There was no portcullis, but in its stead there was a wooden door, duly loopholed, against which sandbags could be piled to resist any attack. The sandbags

were ready in the passage behind, and in three minutes half a dozen men could have backed the door with them. In the ancient castle the gates gave access to a courtyard on the ground level ; in the modern fortress drawbridge and gate opened on a narrow, dark corridor that sloped down into the bowels of the earth. There, under twenty or thirty feet of soil and rock, the garrison could placidly await the end of a bombardment, knowing that science had not yet forged the shell that could reach it. In its artificial caverns it had everything that it could need. There was always a full supply of water and provisions, while thousands of rounds of cartridges were stored in the magazines deep beneath. To the lay mind it seemed inconceivable that such a fortress could ever be taken, even after the most terrific bombardment known in modern warfare and after the most determined assaults.

Even supposing the fortress were carried, it was but a point in the line, an unessential part of the whole fortified area. It was commanded by other fortresses to left and right, dug deeper in the rock and perched on higher hills. The capture of a single work could make no impression on the whole system of defence, for no assailant could hope to hold the outlying fortresses, no matter how great the price he had paid to take them.

In truth, these impregnable earthworks have the same purpose as the walls and towers of the military engineers of the past. Walls and towers were built not so much to resist assault as to force the enemy, following a line of least resistance, into an *impasse* from which there was no escape. In modern warfare the machine-gun and barbed wire play an essential part. The enemy

pours round the edge of the fortress, finding that no power can carry him across its ramparts. So the advancing infantry must pass through the intervals between the fortresses, and there they find fields of barbed wire, which seem at first to be no serious impediment to their advance. They turn a little to the left or to the right, as the case may be, and detachment is divided from detachment by lines which are scarcely visible, but in truth the storming party is being shepherded to its destruction. Barbed wire is splitting it up and guiding each part of it to a point where death is waiting.

Eventually the attack finds itself at a place where two or three machine-guns cross their fire. The bombardment may have been heavy, thousands of tons of explosives may have been thrown into the forest, but that all the defending machine-guns could have been put out of action is past hoping for. They are there at every point of vantage; the woods are bristling with them, and one and all they are protected by steel and concrete shelters, proof against everything except the biggest shell. Some there are which will not be out of action before they have been hit fair and square by three or four enormous projectiles.

There is little hope for the enemy, however keen his aviators, to discover their position, for the trees above provide a shelter such as art has never been able to contrive, and even from below they are hidden cunningly from the sight of the acutest spy. The result is that a handful of men could hold those positions against an army and, if need be, could sell their lives at a price previously unknown in war.

Throughout the Argonne great shelters, proof against

the heaviest bombardment, with twenty or thirty feet of earth above them, were tunnelled in the hills. It is an essential of modern war that the front line should be held with a minimum of men and that in case of attack large forces, duly protected from bombardment, should be ready to hand. The shelters in the Argonne were extremely picturesque. Long tunnels burrowed into the side of a hill, and met in a large cavern, where several thousand men could be accommodated. For the boring of the shafts the newest mechanical devices were employed, and less than 1,000 yards from the enemy one found compressed air drills and borers hard at work. Unfortunately, throughout the Argonne these shelters were very damp, owing to the nature of the stone. From all the walls water was continually dripping, and the shelters had to be pumped out every day to make them habitable. Despite this drawback, however, the *poilus* were wonderfully comfortable, away from the noise of the bombardment and out of all possible danger. Never had the health of the French army been so good, in spite of these trying conditions, and even cases of rheumatism and chill were comparatively rare.

The last two years have shown the terrific power of heavy artillery and modern explosives, but at the same time it has been demonstrated that their effect is, if one considers the extent of the battlefields of to-day, extremely local. As things were in May, 1916, to shell the French from their positions in the Argonne would have needed such a wealth of guns and such an expenditure of ammunition as had never yet been imagined, and it appeared at the time of my visit, at all events, that such an effort would produce results of unspeakable insignificance. "Perhaps," said one

of the generals in this sector to me, "they might get through, if they liked to pay enough in men and ammunition, but one thing I am sure of: the price they would have to pay would be a hundred times heavier than any success they would gain."

Nowhere between the North Sea and Switzerland were the contrasts of the present war more apparent and more striking than in the forest of the Argonne. In the bombarded towns and villages of France—in Rheims, for instance—the sight of civilians buying and selling, working and resting, pursuing the common round of their daily lives, living amid ruins and the ever-present menace of sudden death, is a perpetual wonder; but the contrast between the turmoil of war and destruction in the depths of a lonely forest and the peace of nature that reigns majestically only a few hundred yards away is even more startling and more impressive.

The actual work of entrenchment and fortification had changed the aspect of the forest less than might have been expected. The essential quality of a modern fortress is that it should be sunk in the earth, out of the enemy's sight. Moreover, trees and undergrowth afford invaluable cover, and are therefore preciously preserved. Behind the lines there were great patches of wood, where the ground was still unstirred by spade or pick and where since the war the woodman's axe had been silent. Then one followed a woodland path, broader and more beaten than in time of peace, but almost as lonely and as peaceful. Here, if one were lucky, one might catch a glimpse of certain shy denizens of the forest, which seemed to have grown absolutely accustomed to the noise of the guns. Deer were by no means uncommon, and on the day before my visit the General

commanding the brigade here was taking his morning ride, when in a lonely thicket he came upon two magnificent wild boars, who scarcely condescended to move away at his approach.

Wild animals, as a rule, seemed unfrightened and undisturbed by bombardment. The birds sang continuously through the deafening roar of the cannon, which perhaps they took for an inferior imitation of a thunderstorm. The lark rose singing between the lines, the wren played among the brambles that overhung the trenches, and even the migrants, the swallow, the cuckoo, and the nightingale, had returned to their old haunts, just as though our universal war were a matter of no moment in the kingdom of the birds.

When nearer the lines, one left the more leafy soil of the surface path for the mud of a communication trench. Here trees and undergrowth had suffered more severely, but still, on the ground where a man could only set his foot at the risk of his life, plant, insect, and bird life went on undisturbed. In the destruction of a forest by shell fire there were two stages, particularly noticeable in spring. At first trees were torn up mercilessly and branches lopped off, but still in the tortured saplings and mutilated trunks enough life was left for them to put out buds and break into life. Here one might think that a lunatic gardener had been trying to cut and shape the wood into his idea of order and neatness. Then, if the shells continued to fall, everything green disappeared, shredded and pulverised, into the torn earth below. The trees that still stood grew fewer and fewer; not a branch was left to them, and alike in winter and in spring bare and leafless, pathetic stumps protested mutely against the folly of man.

La Fille Morte, of which the *communiqués* spoke so often, was once a long hill densely wooded with fine trees and thick undergrowth, one of the ribs running westward from the crest which runs through the centre of the Argonne. As I saw it from a deep ravine on its southern side it was simply a white, bare mound, with scarcely a score of melancholy, branchless stems to show that it had once been forest. As for its surface, it was chaos, riddled with shell-holes that touched one another and mine craters round which the fighting never ceased.

Vauquois was once a village perched on a hill; its houses and its church tower were surrounded by thick woods. Church tower, houses, woods, had long ago vanished into dust, and there remained a white naked mound, torn with holes and seamed with trenches, where French and German were less than ten yards apart.

The Argonne is an ideal country for mine warfare. For months and months the opposing lines were in close contact, and each side did its best to make its adversaries' lives impossible by every diabolical means provided by modern science. Nothing is more trying to the nerves than mine warfare. Not the least of its effects is the impression which it produces that the earth on which we live is no longer either trustworthy or solid. At the same time the mine is often a two-edged weapon: the smallest error in the calculation is enough to convert the explosion that was intended to wreck the enemy's trenches into a means of strengthening his lines. "The mine is like the grenade," one of the generals in the Argonne told me, "almost as dangerous to the man who uses it as to the man against whom it is directed."

He had good reason to be pleased with the ill-success of the German mines sprung in his sector during the previous few days. The enemy had made up his mind to accomplish something *kolossal*, and had crammed some thirty tons of high explosives into a saphed which he fondly believed was under the advanced French trenches. When the moment came there was a terrific explosion, and the waiting German infantry dashed out of their cover, hoping to capture without difficulty that part of the lines which they imagined had been completely pulverised. They had not much time to appreciate the situation, as they were received with a murderous fire from the exact point which they supposed to have been wrecked. Some of them, but not many, got back to their trenches, and they no doubt realised that their sappers had made a slight error of direction, and with infinite trouble and pains had sunk and sprung a mine in the debatable ground between the opposing trenches. Result: thirty tons of high explosives wasted, a number of German infantrymen *hors de combat*, and a very big hole at a point where it made no difference to anyone.

In a more modest way the French had been more successful, the General told me. They had located the exact position of an enemy's listening post and driven a small sap beneath it. A reasonable amount of melinite sufficed to blow this post, with all its occupants, into fragments, and enabled the French infantry to occupy it and convert it to their own uses.

The French, however, were not sparing in their admiration for the efficiency and industry of the German sappers. They judged them from a purely impersonal point of view, and drew distinctions between the various

German sections and companies as impartially as though they were awarding prizes in a competition. It was agreed that one particular German company carried off first enemy prize, not only for the Argonne, but also for the whole front. "It is a real pleasure," said an engineer officer, "to work against them. They dig like lunatics. First you find they are three metres down, so you go down five metres. Then you find they are still below you, so you go down seven metres; but still they dig deeper, and there is no end to it. They must have been moles in their last incarnation!"

"Yes, they certainly work hard," said another officer, "but still they do a lot of bluffing. To make us think they are digging day and night when they are doing nothing of the kind, they sometimes hang up a pickaxe from one of the beams of their sap, and leave a man to swing it to and fro, so that it may tap against the rock. We have caught them at it more than once, and so we are no longer impressed by this little trick. The worst luck the Germans have had in this sector was when they tried to blow up our advanced line north of ——. The trenches there were anything but comfortable, and could have been easily rushed. By a lucky chance the sappers failed to carry their mine into our lines, and when they sprang it they simply made a big crater opening immediately in front of our tottering parapet, which provided our men with a practically impregnable rampart."

The Argonne, with all its cover, is a difficult country for artillery, but the French gunners there have accomplished a number of feats of which they may well be proud. On a certain occasion, when the enemy had planned an offensive and was advancing over one of

those bare, shell-torn hills into which certain portions of the dense forest have been converted by modern artillery, the Germans suddenly came on something that they had not in the least expected. Without warning a rain of shells burst among them, doing terrible execution. Hidden among the undergrowth in carefully concealed shelters, proof against the heaviest projectiles, two batteries of quick-firing 65-millimetre mountain guns came into action at point-blank range. The German offensive went no further.

There was a point on one of the tree-hidden roads of the forest which was shown to the visitor as the scene of the exploits of a certain artillery lieutenant. It was no distance from the German lines, but on one occasion, when the Crown Prince was hammering away at the French trenches and his infantry had left their cover, this lieutenant brought up two 75's and set them one on either side of the road. There was no time to link up his guns with the telephone to the front trenches, but, with the aid of a pocket compass and a map, he blazed away at the line where he was convinced the Germans would try to pass. He knew the country well and scarcely wasted a shell, so efficient were his map and compass. The German advance stopped suddenly, and the next day the French counted 400 bodies on the steep hillside, for the majority of which those two 75's had been responsible.

The noise of the guns was like the roar of the sea on a shingly beach. Wave after wave it increased in fierce crescendo to a culminating point, and then there was a sudden unnatural silence, which seemed impossibly still from the contrast and from the anxious certainty that it would be short-lived. It was during

one of these lulls that we reached a particularly interesting point in the Argonne trenches. A deep, narrow valley lay between us and the enemy, whose trenches scarred the steep slope opposite, some 500 yards away as a bullet flies, on a level with the French lines where we were standing. In places the trenches had broken away through the action of the rain or the bursting of a lucky shell, so that we had to keep our heads well ducked and here and there bend almost double, to give no temptation to the German snipers. "Here," said the colonel who was my guide, suiting the action to the word, "there is no danger in showing one's head above the parapet, so long as one does not move. Our trench helmets will not show against this background, unless a sudden movement catches a sentinel's eye."

The trench helmet had become practically *de rigueur* in the trenches, even for civilians. It was not so much as a shield against shrapnel or flying shell splinters, though against them it was an effective protection, but rather it was invaluable because it defended the visitor's head against bumps, sudden and severe, against the low roofs of the shelters and the steps that led down to them. Moreover, the glimpse of a trench helmet in the opposing lines did not excite the Boche to a wild bombardment, such as would be surely attracted by the appearance of a civilian bowler or cap, which the enemy would interpret as the headgear of a person of importance, not a mere journalist, but a Minister at least.

With head held somewhat stiffly and, I must admit, a secret hope that my helmet matched the background, since at 600 yards a head offered a target not easily to

be missed, I raised my head above the parapet and studied the German trench on the scarred hillside opposite. The men on either side were on the look-out for anything that might show itself, as two or three rifle shots that rang out in the valley proved. From this point of vantage the whole position was as clear as if the French lines were marked in blue and the German in red upon a map, and it was made still clearer by the arrival of two artillery officers, who had come to direct a *tir de réglage*. One of them pointed out to me the exact point at which a battery of six-inch guns was to fire in order to find the range, while batteries of 75's, hidden somewhere not far behind us, barked out intermittently and threw shells apparently at random into the German lines.

"I doubt," he said, "if we shall get very near the mark to begin with, as we have just got a new lot of shells up, and we did not find the range before very accurately. However, we can but try." He called an order to a man in a shelter at his elbow, and the order was passed on through the telephone to the battery far away in the rear: "Second piece, x yards, y degrees!" From the shelter came the announcement: "The second piece is ready." "Fire!" said the officer, and a second later the man at the telephone remarked: "*Le coup est parti!*" The officer, who had been peacefully sitting on a stone with his notebook before him, rose to his feet and, leaning over the parapet, fixed his glasses on the target. A few seconds later there came the whirring sound of a large shell hurtling through the air, and then a dull explosion.

A column of black smoke and earth rose exactly at the spot that had been pointed out to me as the target.

The long six-inch shell which was being used is very impressive from the spectacular point of view, and even more effective from the standpoint of the men on whose trenches it falls. "Really, that is wonderful luck," said the artillery officer, "to have found our mark at the very first try, particularly with a new lot of shells! Now let us see if another piece will be equally successful."

The order was passed down the telephone to the fourth gun of the battery, and again we heard the big six-inch shell ploughing its way through the air. This time the explosion was about twenty yards out, and due correction was made in the elements given to the gunners. The first and third pieces were as successful as that which had fired first. Watching through the glasses the effects of the explosions, I saw a large pine tree torn up by the roots and thrown into the air, to fall some yards away on its head. One realised that it was better to be in the French lines, where we were standing, than in the German trenches, where the earth was being rent and large trees tossed upwards like bits of straw in a whirlwind.

The enemy was in sleepy mood that morning, and accepted the French shells without attempting to reply, so, after waiting for a time to see if he would be stung to action, we went back through the shady woods to where our motors were waiting for us under cover.

The next day, by a stroke of luck, we came upon one of those little operations which were daily taking place all along the French front. It was a question of straightening out the line, of driving the Germans from a point of vantage which was annoying the front trenches, and the whole affair took place in ground

which had been torn to pieces not only by shells, but also by mine explosions. We arrived towards the end of the operation. The ground had been prepared by a preliminary bombardment which the artillery officers proudly declared was a model of its kind. The infantry officers said the whole thing was infantile in its simplicity: the artillery had killed or paralysed the Boches and wrecked their defences; then the infantry had come out and carried the position. The official *communiqué* gave the whole affair just one line.

To an eye-witness who is not a professional soldier the whole business seemed very different alike from the description of the artilleryman, the infantryman, and the *communiqué*. It was in one of those ravines so characteristic of the Argonne that we met the colonel in charge of the sector. The colonel was rubbing his hands with glee as he came down the hill towards us. "Welcome, gentlemen!" he said; "you have come in the nick of time! We have just had a nice little success and done exactly what we wanted without the loss of a man! If you hurry up to the observation post above, you will be able to watch our men digging themselves in in the enemy's positions, and you will be in time for the enemy's reply."

We scrambled up the steep hillside as quickly as we could, following a path through the forest which seemed as lonely and peaceful as though there was no war. The call of the cuckoo echoed impudently through the noise of the guns, and a tiny wren was perched at the edge of the communication trench which we had entered as soon as we had left the shelter of the ravine. From the observation post the contrast was an extraordinary one. We had left the woods of

great trees, green with spring foliage ; we had left the ground where anemones, violets, and all the spring flowers were in bloom. Before our eyes there lay a white, naked hill, where a few sorry trunks and stumps as bare as broomsticks took the place of the trees they once had been, and where all green things and all flowers had disappeared, swept away by an avalanche of steel and fire.

This destruction was the work of the French guns, and the gunners had good reason to be proud of it. Once the slopes had been as green and shady as the forest through which we had passed. But the trees and underwood gave shelter to the enemy of mankind, and so relentlessly they had been destroyed. Some day, when the invader is no more, the forest will grow again, and the nakedness of the hillside will be hidden once more by trees and saplings such as those that were sacrificed for the sake of France.

How many shells that hill had received during months of fighting no man can say. It suffices to know that their holes touched one another across its whole expanse ; as the French say, it was riddled like an *écumoir* (strainer). In the sunlight one looked out on a map of the moon, for the shadow of each shell-hole was mysterious and black, throwing into vivid contrast the white ridges that lay between. Here and there the even pattern of the shell craters was cut by a white line—the line of the trenches ; and from time to time this line was cut by huge circular excavations, the craters of mines. It was round one of these mine craters that the day's fight had taken place.

This particular crater was on the right of the white ridge in front of us, some 500 yards away, and on one

of its edges we could see French soldiers hard at work digging and piling up sandbags to defend the captured positions. As for the Germans, they were a few yards behind, and the green woods that one could discern behind the crest, still unharmed by shell fire, were full of them. The enemy seemed depressed. For some reason he did not reply to a blow which must have annoyed him considerably, and the only sign of his resentment was the grey smoke and sharp reports of grenades hurled at random at the French trenches.

As a preliminary to the operation the men had been withdrawn from the advanced trenches at the point where the assault was to be made, for the opposing lines were only nine or ten yards apart, and the best artillery in the world cannot be accurate within so small a limit. The danger of French shells bursting in the French trenches was too great to be risked. The evacuation accomplished, 250 six-inch shells were neatly thrown on to the coveted point of the German lines. These shells, it was reckoned, would be more than sufficient to demolish all the German shelters and machine-guns and to stupefy any of the enemy's men who might have been lucky enough to escape the bombardment. Meantime the 75's opened a *feu de barrage* to left and right of the doomed position, so that no help could come from either side and the enemy might be discouraged from an attack on the evacuated trenches.

The guns did their work beautifully, and when the avalanche of six-inch shells had finished the storming party dashed out with bayonet and grenade. There was scarcely any resistance. The grenade or bayonet accounted for every German left alive, and in a few

minutes the French had thrown aside their weapons of offence and were working to strengthen their position as only men can work who know that their lives depend on their industry. In the telling the *coup de main* sounds delightfully easy, but in the doing it was a hard and perilous attempt. Even after one had heard the rain of big shells bursting on the enemy's line, almost without reply, it was no joke to scramble along the edge of a deep mine crater, to jump over the remnants of the barbed wire and hurl oneself into the enemy trench without knowing whether suddenly, without warning, one was not going to be exposed to the deadly fire of a concealed machine-gun. However, it was a job to which the men in the trenches from the North Sea to Switzerland had grown accustomed.

Up in the observation post we watched the Frenchmen working feverishly at their sandbags in an agony of expectation. Surely the German artillery was going to open upon them and wipe them out before they had time to raise a rampart of defence. But, except for the crack of rifles and an occasional grenade, the silence was broken only by the roar of guns far away. Each moment the bank of sandbags grew higher, and we knew that as the bank rose the trench behind was deepening. At last it became clear that for the time being, at any rate, the enemy had decided to sit down under his defeat, and was in no mood to sting back. It may have been that at the moment all his ammunition was needed for the wild attempt that was being made against Verdun a few miles farther east, and of which we could hear the distant bombardment.

A wounded man came back along the communication trench from the mine crater that had just been captured.

He was a little wiry man with a straggly yellow beard, rather pale from his injury, but full of cheerfulness and good spirits. "How are things going on up there?" we asked him. "Splendid!" he replied; "not a single man killed or wounded!" "But you," we asked—"aren't you wounded?" "No," he replied; "*c'est la blessure filon*, which means I shall have a week's rest. It's not a real wound, but only that a beam of wood we were putting into position behind the sandbags fell on my shoulder and has bruised it badly." We left the little man to go smiling on towards the rear, and an officer explained to me the meaning of the mysterious phrase "*la blessure filon*." A "*filon d'or*" is a vein of gold, and to a weary man a slight wound often seems as precious as a gold mine.

The French six-inch gun makes a very considerable amount of noise, and its shells, both from their whistling in the air and exploding, should be audible to the deafest ears. Yet in this war noise has become a purely relative term, and a mere detail of several hundred six-inch shells whistling over one's head and bursting a few hundred yards away may pass unnoticed. When we left the observation post we met a major certainly not more than 800 yards from the advanced lines, and he had not heard a sound of the bombardment which preceded the attack. "When," he asked the staff officer who was conducting me round the lines, "is our artillery preparation going to begin? I understood that we were going to make an attack on the point D. Has it been put off?" "Why," replied the officer, "it is all over, and we have captured all we were aiming at without any loss!" The major shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, it did not really affect me," he

said, " so I paid less attention, but I have been listening all day to hear our guns get to work, and it amazes me that the thing should be over ! " " Well," said the staff officer, " I can assure you that between 200 and 300 shells have passed over your head, and you don't seem to have heard a single one of them ! "

The afternoon ended, so far as we were concerned, with tea in the colonel's " dug-out." The colonel was naturally jubilant. Only one man had been actually wounded in the whole affair, and he was not engaged in the attack, but was standing by a machine-gun that was not in action when a stray bullet found him. Round the colonel's hospitable table we drank in tea to the success of the allied arms and ate such a selection of little cakes—*petits fours* of every description—as it would be hard to find in the most expensive Paris tea-room. They had been made that very morning only a few hundred yards from the Boches by a *patissier*, a master in his art, whom fate had called to fight for his country in the Argonne.

The Argonne is prolonged to the east towards Verdun by the forest of Hesse ; on the west it is joined to Eastern Champagne by the wood called the Bois d'Hauzy. Trench warfare was still in its infancy when, in April, 1915, I visited this point of the line and the full meaning of modern scientific destruction had not yet been manifested, although already we imagined, in our ignorance, that nothing could be more terrible than the first nine months of the Great War.

Every Englishman has as his birthright a little patch of English country that, no matter where he may wander, he will always consider as peculiarly his own. The writer claims as his birthright a Hampshire wood,

where for thirty years he was free to wander at his own free will, and where in April the ground was white with anemones, and he might be sure of hearing the first cuckoo of the year. The Bois d'Hauzy was that spring the very image of this wood.

Frail anemones were swaying to and fro in a fitful breeze, and insects, many and bright-coloured, were busy among the opening spring flowers. Jays were chattering and scolding in the undergrowth, furious at our intrusion; and it was there for the first time that I heard the call of the cuckoo. Here and there a tree had already burst into leaf, and everywhere the buds were swelling with the coming of the spring. The wood and its inhabitants seemed to be living their lives alone, happy without human interference; and to the wanderer fresh from Paris, with his eyes blinded by its beauty, his sense of smell deadened by its spring fragrance, and his ears deafened to everything but nature by the whispering of the wind in the branches and the pleasant conversation of the birds, it seemed a paradise on earth.

Yet beneath all the little murmurings of animal life, the sighing of the wind, and the clear notes of the cuckoo, there was a formidable undercurrent of tempestuous sound, the deafening thunder of modern war. Sometimes, if the hearer's mind was rightly attuned, it was drowned by the peaceful woodland whispers; but a moment later it would return with self-assertive violence, and nothing was audible except the ear-splitting crash of cannon and the whirring rush of shells tearing open the air as telegraph wires split the wind asunder. For this wood, with its flowers and birds and chequered shadows, was not a peaceful south

country coppice, but a vital strategical point uniting the French fighting line in Champagne with the forest of Argonne. It was pushed forward northwards, like a wedge, into the German lines, and even on its southern boundary we were between the second and third lines of the French defence.

We had been brought there by military motor-cars that dashed along at break-neck speed past the little undulating hills of the Champagne Pouilleuse, which is almost a desert, and where, outside the zone of the rich vineyards of the real Champagne, the peasant makes a precarious living by incessant toil. The ground was white and barren, torn here and there with great conical shell-holes ; and the only relief to its melancholy desolation, under the hot spring sun, was given by little plantations of fir trees that still seemed cool and fresh, though they had been ruthlessly laid waste by German shell and the axes of the French engineers.

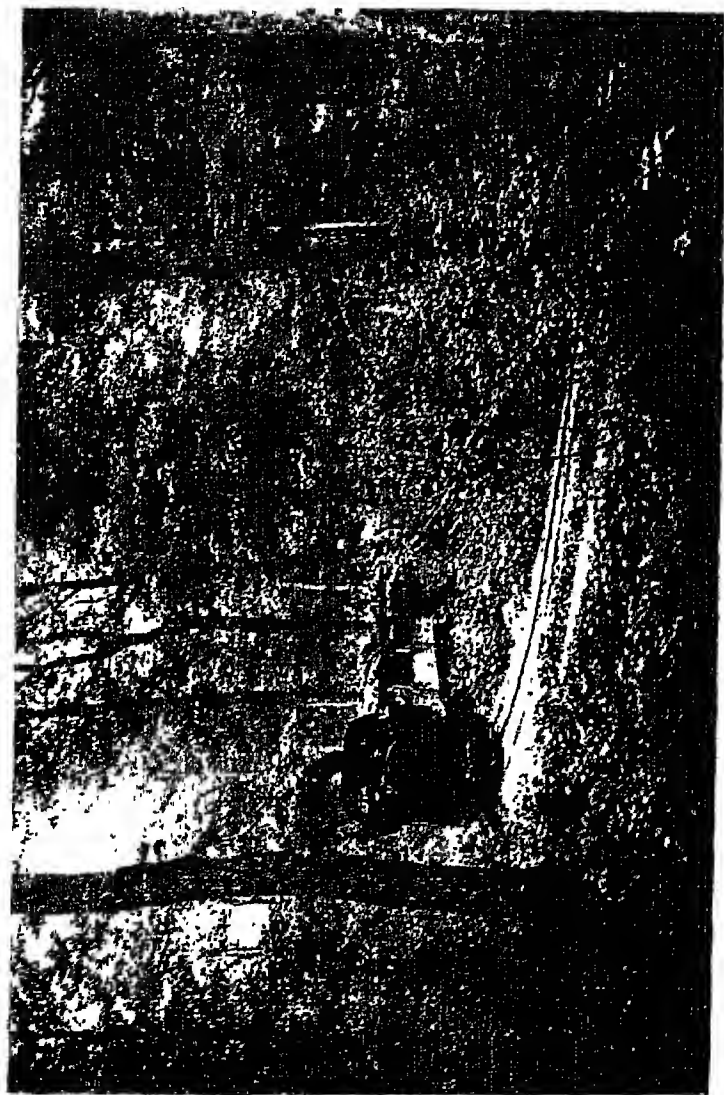
On our right stretched out the great forest of the Argonne, still brown and leafless, though already its trees had taken on that rich reddish glow which tells of swelling buds. From its forest fastnesses there came the intermittent boom of distant guns.

For some time we had known that we must be rapidly approaching the enemy's lines, as the countryside suddenly became deserted. Convoys had disappeared from the roads, and there was not even a sentry to challenge us. In the rear there had been the unending coming and going of a vast multitude, and country roads had been as crowded as a Paris street ; but within range of the enemy's guns there was a great loneliness, and it seemed that it was an invisible host which barred the way to the invader.

At the last village, a mere heap of shapeless ruins, the major in command of our party had ordered the motor-cars to keep several hundred yards apart, so as not to attract the German fire, for unseen hostile eyes kept an unfailing watch on the road by which we went. We drew up just below the crest of a hill, for further on the position was too exposed ; and while we set out to walk through the wood on our right towards the first line of defence, the cars took cover in a small fir coppice on the left of the road.

Though there was no board with the familiar " Trespassers will be prosecuted " to warn us off, it was with something of the adventurous feeling of the trespasser that we plunged into the undergrowth. Around us flowers, birds, and insects were rejoicing in the coming of the spring, as though humanity and its universal war mattered not at all ; the jays were more annoyed by our appearance than by the cannonade, which as we advanced became more and more noisy and incessant, and the cuckoo took advantage of each lull to mock the violence of man.

We had not walked far before we began to discover that our wood was not so ordinary as it seemed at first sight. Trees and undergrowth had been cut down in a strange and arbitrary fashion, such as no skilled and tidy forester would suffer. In some places large clearings had been made, and every vestige of undergrowth had been mercilessly swept away ; elsewhere only trees and saplings of a certain size had been sacrificed, and their branches had been lopped off and left tangled with the thick brushwood ; sometimes not a tree or a sapling had been touched, and the wood was as impenetrable as nature could make it,



DECAUVILLE RAILWAY IN THE ARGONNF FOREST.

The explanation of this ragged unevenness was given by an artificial hedge at the edge of a clearing. A row of branches stuck upright in the ground served to conceal this open space from the enemy's observation. As a general rule the trees and underwood had only been cut down when they were useless as a screen, while they had been carefully preserved at every point which could be overlooked by the enemy.

Then the paths of this wood were curious. Though the place seemed uninhabited, and but for the sound of the guns miles and miles from human life, every path, whether it was a main track or a little winding side path, such as keepers make to a snare, had been carefully paved with stout branches and saplings, neatly fitted together and laid one against the other, like the ribs in corduroy. It was such work as children might attempt, to pass dry-foot over a yard or two of swampy ground, and then leave unfinished when it had whiled away an idle hour. But here one walked for miles, not on earth, or moss, or trampled grass, but on these wooden paths.

A few days ago the whole countryside was a morass, and to enable the French to move about and bring up supplies without sinking over the knees in mud the whole wood had been laid out with a complete system of these rustic causeways. Where the mud was particularly deep thicker saplings had been used, and occasionally portions of tree trunks of considerable girth. The sun had dried the chalky ground with amazing rapidity, but though the paths of corduroy, or *rondins*, do not make for comfortable walking, a glance at the caked mud all round showed how invaluable they must have been during the winter.

The wood had been marked out like a great game with streets and avenues and boulevards, their names all neatly written up on rough-hewn boards. If you followed the Rue de la Victoire and turned into the Rue de la Paix, a thoroughfare at least a foot broad, without falling into the ditch along which it ran, you could rest at the Carrefour des Blagueurs ("the Jokers' Cross-roads"), or continue your journey by the Boulevard Niel, a street that was very properly marked as "*interdit aux cavaliers*," since a horse would have small chance of keeping its footing on it for a minute. When you reached the Rue George V. you knew that the Boches were only a few hundred yards away.

Occasionally one would find a part of the wood which seemed to have been the centre of a local typhoon. Trees had been split and snapped asunder, and large branches strewn about the place in utter disorder. A glance at the ground would discover the splinters of the shell that had done the mischief.

The Germans had been trying to find with their projectiles one of those rustic observation stations which are so valuable for the direction of artillery fire. A rough-hewn ladder, nailed securely to a tall tree, leads up to a small and giddy platform, provided with a telephone which seems as improbable in a lonely wood as Peter Pan's little house among the tree tops of the forest.

At last we reached the cottage that served as headquarters to the officer commanding the wood. Its position the Germans had never been able to discover, and it was so well concealed that they were never likely to do so. Its one living room was decorated with an alarming ancestral portrait, a photograph of General Joffre, and a picture postcard of a ballet dancer, and

its furniture was distinctly primitive, but for soldiers on active service its bed, table, and rickety rush chairs were a luxury.

Its owner was very proud of his house, but perforce he abandoned it before the German advance. He had very little hope of seeing it again ; but a month or so later he came back to it for an hour or two, and was overjoyed to find it intact in the hands of the French troops. " I have come back for my overcoat," he told the officer in command. " I felt sure that my house had been destroyed, but I said to myself, ' If it is still in existence, that overcoat would be very useful and would save me buying a new one. ' "

He departed, rejoicing, with his overcoat, after making a special request that his rather nondescript collection of crockery might be treated as tenderly as possible. If it was spared by German shells, he did not want it broken by a soldier servant's clumsiness. It was in his crockery that tea was served, while we revelled in the cool after our long and thirsty walk. The teapot was a cracked salad bowl, and its contents were distributed with a soup ladle. There was either a more or less broken tumbler, or a fragmentary cup, or a tin mug for each of us, and we were all agreed that we had never tasted anything more refreshing.

While we sat and rested, the officers tried to teach us to distinguish between an *arrivée* and a *départ*, the *arrivée* being the arrival and explosion of a German shell in the French lines, and the *départ* the departure of a French shell from the cannon's mouth on its errand of destruction. There was a French battery of 75's not far from us, pounding away indefatigably at the German positions, while the

Germans, in their efforts to locate the battery annoying them, were firing projectiles of varying sizes that were falling about half a mile away.

The violence of the detonations made the little house tremble to its foundations. There would come three ear-splitting reports in quick succession, each followed by the rushing whirr of a shell. "*Voilà un départ,*" said the officers. "That is the way our 75's talk French."

A minute later these sharp cracks of the 75's would be followed by an uncomfortable whistling sound of something hurtling through the air, more or less in our direction; sometimes, if the shell were a heavy one, the sound as it approached would become an unsteady droning buzz, as though the projectile was wobbling uneasily in its course. Then there would come a dull, heavy detonation. "*Voilà une arrivée,*" said the officers. "Cannot you understand the guttural German?"

When we pushed on again towards the front trenches, everything was peaceful, except for the cannonade. The wood was as deserted as ever, until in its very heart we reached the quarters of the men who are always held in readiness to reinforce the first line of defence. Trees and undergrowth were at their densest, and under their protecting shade stood a large row of picturesque huts; all around them hundreds of men were working or resting.

Modern warfare is full of these violent contrasts. Whole armies are hidden so cunningly from the aviator's far-seeing eye that they are invisible until suddenly one falls right upon them. Without warning one plunges from the loneliness of a forest into the animation of a large encampment.

The huts, despite their size and solid structure, were in keeping with their environment, and one could have passed them by, only a few yards away, without any idea that they were there. Towards the enemy their walls were of enormous thickness, huge buttresses of earth held together by hurdles, and backed with tree trunks and still more earth and hurdles. Their roofs also, which were equally solid, consisted of earth, hurdles, and tree trunks, with a sheet of corrugated iron to keep out the damp, the corrugated iron being carefully buried under earth and branches, lest it should attract the aviator.

These shelters, which were an adaptation of the backwoodsman's log cabin, could take a good-sized shell with impunity. In the Bois d'Hauzy, as in Flanders, water is found so near the surface of the soil that trenches and underground refuges were out of the question. Since it was hopeless to burrow, the soldier had to throw up his defences above the ground and to build great walls and ramparts capable of resisting the impact of a large projectile.

The soldiers who lived in these rustic fortresses declared themselves well satisfied with their cosy quarters. It is no small thing in time of war to have a bunk well filled with clean straw to sleep in. Some of them were at work building new huts, while others were sitting round tables that were made of hurdles raised on sticks and tree stumps, taking their midday meal.

They were dressed in stuffs of many kinds and many hues, ranging from the labourer's corduroy to the latest invisible cloth of atmospheric blue—a cheerful, healthy-looking set of men, who had scarcely seen a civilian during the last six months, and who greeted our

unexpected appearance as an amusing break in the monotony of their lives.

After an exchange of chaff and greetings we went on our way, and soon found ourselves on the edge of the wood. An artificial hedge of withered fir branches, a distinctly frail obstacle to rifle bullets, protected the passer-by from the observation of the enemy a few hundred yards away. The hedge ended at a point where two solid walls of earth met at right angles. On our right we looked down a line of loopholed ramparts, glittering white in the sun with the eternal chalk of the Champagne Pouilleuse. Sentries, in pale sky-blue uniforms that seemed to fade away into the whiteness of the soil, were stationed at the loopholes, and were watching untiringly with their rifle-butts pressed to their shoulders, ready for any movement on the other side of the valley.

At this point of the front the French position formed a wedge driven into the enemy's lines, and its outline followed the course of a stream and its tributary in the valley below, that divided the opposing armies. Our destination was the extreme point of this wedge, known as La Sapinière, the Pine Clump. To reach it we went straight on, with a great wall on our right hand.

The walls, like the shelters, were made of earth, hurdles, and tree trunks. They were about eight feet high, with a low wall, rather like a shop counter, running a foot or two behind to provide protection against splinters from shells bursting in the rear. The whole length of the wall was loopholed. Sentries were standing at regular intervals, and in each vacant loophole there lay two rifles ready for use at the first alarm.

The sentries stood motionless as statues, with their

eyes fixed on the strip of ground that was visible through their loopholes. It was not an interesting view—hundreds of wooden posts with barbed wire entanglements between them and a few yards of white chalky soil which dropped away suddenly down to the stream below, then, on the other side of the valley, a similar slope equally white and barren, where the Germans lay concealed, and the shattered church tower of a ruined village which was one of their strongholds.

At one point the wall gave place to a low bank and a rather scanty hedge. Here we had to pass not more than two at a time, so as not to draw the enemy's fire, while a notice advised us to keep well to the left. The Germans, however, did not think a party of journalists worthy even of a bullet.

This gap once passed, we found ourselves in La Sapinière, the extreme point of the position. It was a thick shady grove of fir trees which formed a practically impervious screen. Outside it was hot sunshine, and the noise of the guns was very loud and incessant. Inside all was cool and peaceful, and the cannonade seemed suddenly very far away ; half drowned by the sighing of the wind in the branches above, it was scarcely more than the murmuring of a distant sea on a pebbly beach.

Among the tree trunks was a village of little houses such as are always found in the forest of a fairy tale. Men were walking about quietly, placidly engaged in their ordinary occupations, as though there was no such thing as war, and as though for their own pleasure they had chosen to camp out in this pleasant pine wood. A group of men working hard at digging a well seemed to be making light of their toil and to be regarding it

as part of a game. A funny little wooden letter-box, nailed to a branch, announced that the post left at noon each day; and a notice threatened with untold penalties anyone who should commit the crime of cutting down a tree in La Sapinière.

A week or two before things had been very different. Then the men were struggling night and day with their relentless enemy mud, which had made their lives a burden. But now the spring sun had conquered, the nightmare of the winter was forgotten, and every man's face expressed a lively satisfaction.

Not that La Sapinière was always so peaceful a spot. On the contrary, it was often a very warm corner, exposed to a converging fire. For an ever-watchful enemy was always close at hand, and by day and night death was lurking in the faint white lines, ploughed like a furrow along the hill slope, where the German trenches were.

A few of the trees had been torn and split by shell fire, but it was only as if a storm had passed, and it was hard to realise how exposed the position was. And yet, as an officer said, "When the Germans have nothing better to do they throw shrapnel on La Sapinière, and then it is anything but a comfortable place to live in!"

As we walked back behind the lines the delusion of peace and tranquillity still persisted, although the violence of the guns had redoubled. A brimstone butterfly fluttered over the oxlips that grew in profusion along a little ditch, and a bright green beetle sunned itself in a patch of moss. I only saw one living thing that was afraid, a brown linnet, which suddenly rose from a bush and flew about in a state of wild alarm after a particularly loud explosion.

The sun was low on the horizon when we reached the automobiles. A long black storm-cloud hid its disc, and its rays, pouring down from behind the veil, spread a fiery sea of dazzling radiance over the western horizon, making the hills stand out black and stark as though their outline was all their substance, like paste-board scenery in a theatre. Suddenly marking out a diamond against the blackness of the cloud, there appeared four little puffs of fleecy white smoke, which held together for all the world like balls of cotton-wool suspended in mid-air.

"Shrapnel!" exclaimed an officer. "They are firing at one of our aeroplanes."

Intently we gazed up into the liquid gold of the evening haze, and for a long time we could see nothing but the little white clouds of smoke and the great black cloud behind them. Then suddenly, as the image rises on a photographic plate under the developer, we became aware of the enemy's target. Framed in the very centre of the diamond were two faint parallel lines, the wings of a French biplane.

Silently and, as it seemed, miraculously, fresh puffs of smoke formed themselves inside the diamond nearer and nearer to the aeroplane. Our ears had grown accustomed to the cannonade as though it were silence, the normal substratum to every sound, and in its uproar the reports of the anti-aircraft guns were inaudible.

The enemy was shooting well, and the biplane swerved hastily away towards its own lines, having, as we knew afterwards, accomplished its purpose. In a few seconds it vanished, swallowed up in the colours of the sunset.

Next day we met the aviator. Three shrapnel bullets had passed through the body of his machine. When we saw him he was picking one of them out in an absent-minded way, taking as much interest in it as a man might show in a pebble that he had shaken out of his boot. His mind was entirely occupied with a grievance. One of the bombs that he had dropped on the enemy's lines had failed to explode, and he kept on saying over and over again, "What I want to know is who is the unspeakable idiot that manufactured the rotten things." It was nothing to him that the shrapnel had found no vital part, nor was he in the least consoled because the rest of his bombs had exploded just where and when they were intended to.

It was fated that that evening, before we returned to Châlons-sur-Marne, we were to witness a still more exciting battle in the air. Scarcely had the biplane disappeared when two fresh aeroplanes came into sight. The wind, which had been gusty all day, had dropped with the westering sun, and the aviators on both sides were determined to make the most of the evening calm. One of these machines was a German biplane flying southwards towards the French lines, the other a French biplane northward bound.

Which aviator sighted the other first it was impossible to tell, but suddenly it became clear to the spectators below that a silent challenge had passed between them. The two aeroplanes sped each towards the other, and neither aviator shrank from the ordeal of single combat 5,000 feet above the ground.

A general stopped his automobile and, standing up, watched the mortal struggle through his glasses. Soldiers by the roadside stood still and shouted to their

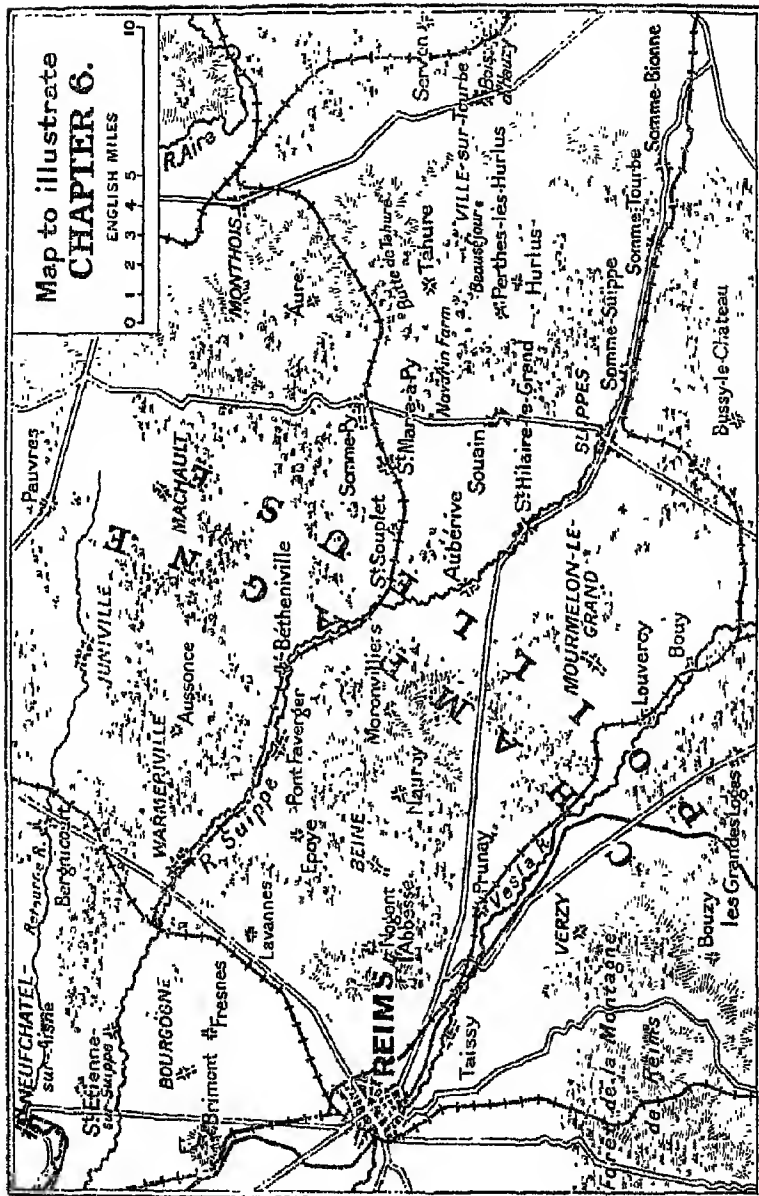
comrades: "Come and look! *C'est la chasse aux Taubes.*"

Meantime the storm-cloud was becoming more and more dark and threatening, and the rift into infinite distance below it more golden and more fire-like. It was a battle between two well-matched adversaries eager to play the game where the stake is life or death. Up they went in spirals, like falcon and heron, and it seemed to us that the Frenchman held the advantage.

The lower rim of the sun's disc had fallen beneath the ragged edge of the cloud, and all the west was burning with the splendour of fire. Against the glory of the sunset we on the ground below saw the outline of a monoplane, graceful as a dragon-fly, darting forward towards the battle in the straight, unswerving line that only winged things can follow. At the same moment, out of the nothingness of dazzling light, appeared another biplane darting towards the same goal. In a few seconds it was clear that the newcomers were French. Help was coming to the Frenchman from the sunset clouds.

The German struggled on valiantly until he saw the odds against him. Then, game to the last, he tried with a bold sweep to draw his enemy within range of the guns below. But it was too late. From the French biplane, while the shrapnel burst round it unheeded, came flash upon flash; the mitrailleuse was speaking. The German aeroplane quivered a little and then began to fall, struggling like a wounded bird to right itself. For a second it recovered itself, and then it plunged headlong downwards, faster and faster, until it vanished from our sight behind the black screen of forest trees that fringed the horizon.

ENGLISH MILES



CHAPTER VI

THE CHAMPAGNE POUILLEUSE

AT nine o'clock on the morning of September 25th, 1915, a thrill of wild excitement and expectation ran through the long line of French trenches, cut white in the chalk of the Champagne Pouilleuse, from the Bois d'Hauzy, on the edge of the Argonne forest, right away to the valley of the Suippe, below the heights of Moronvillers. Thousands of men, packed close in the narrow square-hewn trenches, were inspired with the same hope and the same enthusiasm, proof against all fear of death or defeat.

The long-desired moment had almost come; there was to be a break in the weary monotony of trench warfare, and they were to meet their enemy, the invader of *la belle France*, in the open, face to face. He might skulk in the shelter of his trenches, but even there he would learn that French bayonets and French grenades could reach him.

For three days there had been one long unending cannonade, deafening and nerve-racking, until it seemed that silence could never again belong to this world. The whole countryside, with its bare and undulating hills broken here and there by sad, shell-torn fir woods, was hidden beneath the smoke of countless bursting shells. The enemy replied as best he could, but against such a weight of metal his artillery was powerless. If from time to time a German shell, better aimed than

usual, burst on a parapet or wrecked a shelter, the French soldiers, as they helped the wounded and repaired the trenches, could smile grimly at the thought that the damage done was as nothing to the sufferings of the enemy under the merciless storm of fire and steel. After a year's warfare, they were veterans one and all, and could calculate to a nicety the moral and material effect produced by their guns upon the enemy.

Sometimes there would come a sudden lull in the terrible violence of the cannonade, and the Frenchmen knew from experience that the very respite was more trying to the nerves of the Boches in the trenches 100 yards away than the crashing uproar and confusion of the bursting shells. Bewildered and half stupefied in their "dug-outs," their *trous de renard* far beneath the surface, they were waiting in an agony of anxiety and suspense for the inevitable moment when the powers of hell would be let loose again, shattering their trenches, bringing their shelters about their ears, and burying them deep in the refuges to die a lingering death by suffocation. Once at least in their nervousness the Germans believed that such a temporary lull announced an immediate assault, and hastily sent forward their reserves to man the front trenches, only to be cut to pieces by a fresh avalanche of shells.

There were many signs by which the experienced soldier could tell that the long months of inaction were at an end. With modern weapons 300 yards is the utmost depth of open ground that an infantry charge can hope to cover. Wherever along the line the opposing trenches were more than 300 yards apart, the French trenches had been effectively and expeditiously advanced within striking distance of the enemy.

In the shallow punch bowl in the centre of which lies the ruined village of Souain, a Colonial division, commanded by General Marchand, had carried forward its lines nearly 1,000 yards. So brilliantly was the operation carried out that, with insignificant losses, a new system of trenches was pushed forward, following accurately the outline of the German position, and the enemy woke up one morning to find that nowhere between Aubérive and Servon were the French more than 300 yards from his first line.

The ever increasing intensity of the bombardment was sufficient proof that a general assault was to be attempted, and the order of the day issued that morning by General Joffre, proclaiming like a trumpet call the certainty of victory, left no doubt that a great battle was impending :—

“SOLDIERS OF THE REPUBLIC,

“After months of waiting, which have allowed us to increase our forces and our resources, while the enemy was wearing down his own, the time has come to attack and conquer and to add new pages of glory to those of the Marne, of Flanders, of the Vosges, and of Arras.

“Behind the hurricane of steel—let loose thanks to the industry of the factories of France, where our brothers have worked night and day for us—together you will advance to the assault along the whole front, in close union with the armies of our allies. Nothing will be able to stand against your dash.

“The first effort will carry you to the enemy’s batteries, beyond the fortified lines that are opposed to you. You will give him neither truce nor rest till the accomplishment of victory.

“Forward with a good heart for the deliverance of our country’s soil, for the triumph of right and liberty !

“J. JOFFRE,

“Generalissimo.”

Early that morning the troops began to file down the narrow communication trenches and to mass in the advanced line ready for the attack. In the new system of trenches constructed by General Marchand's division, huge *places d'armes* had been prepared to allow the concentration of a great number of men on a single point; one of them, capable of sheltering a whole battalion and protected by over 20,000 sandbags, was nicknamed the "Place de l'Opéra," and the men could stroll about there, 300 yards from the enemy, as freely and as safely as if they were in a barrack square.

It was raining heavily, and the dense grey clouds had come down low over the melancholy countryside, with its bare white rolling hills and its shattered fir copses. On the previous day the aeroplanes had been doing yeoman work in directing the fire of the artillery on the vital points of the enemy's position, but on the day of the attack they could be of no assistance.

Until 9.15 a.m., the moment appointed for the assault, the guns redoubled their efforts, covering the whole of the German lines with a hail of steel, and searching with particular attention the German advanced trenches. Then suddenly the noise of artillery ceased, and along more than fifteen miles of trenches a wave of men scrambled over the parapets and dashed madly forward across the open ground that separated them from the enemy.

This was no army of parade, and it was not in quest of glory or adventure that its soldiers sprang up so gaily from their burrows in the earth to the upper ground, where for months it had been certain death for a man to show himself. It was the resistless onrush of a citizen army adapted to every requirement of



AN UNDERGROUND SHUTTER IN THE ANTIQUITY

modern scientific warfare, an army of specialists, fighting with the grim ferocity with which a she-wolf defends her lair, and eager to sacrifice life itself if they could but win back for their country the smallest parcel of their patrimony, the soil of France. The martial swagger of the red trousers, which made their wearer a perfect target, had passed away, and the men who charged were clad in faded pale blue uniforms that scarcely showed at all against the chalky background, or it might be that they were Algerians and Moroccans, dressed in drab colours verging on khaki, which blends away into everything. Every man was wearing the then new trench helmet, a light casque of blue steel, which protects a man's brainpan from shell splinter, shrapnel, or grenade.

The Moroccans and Algerians had exercised prodigies of ingenuity in reconciling the new headpiece with the turban of their religion. Sometimes the helmet was perched jauntily on the top of the turban, like an accessory to be used only when occasion demanded and there was steel in the air; sometimes it was carefully swathed in the folds of the turban, which crowned it in a way comically suggestive of an old maid's cap.

There was no regular fringe of bayonets to add a picturesque touch to the flood of men who poured towards the German trenches. Bayonets were fixed, and some men dashed forward determined to give the Boches a taste of cold steel, but the majority had their rifles slung from their shoulders, a grenade in each hand, and their *musette*, full of grenades, upon their back.

The ground they had to cover in full view of the enemy varied between 150 and 300 yards over a chalky soil sparsely covered with coarse grass, nearly always

uphill. It was slippery with the slime that covers the whole Champagne: Pouilleuse after a few drops of rain. First, after the glorious adventure of emerging into the open, they had to push aside the *chevaux de frise*—crossed iron bars, shaped like a knife rest, entangled with barbed wire, which protected their own position. This was a task of no great difficulty, since, as a rule, the French had no fixed defences outside their first line. Then came the dash across the debatable ground. From the opposing trenches there should have come a withering fire, while from the rear the German field guns should have covered their infantry with a screen of shells. Nothing of the kind happened. There were a few rifle shots, and a few men fell. Here and there a Maxim had escaped the torrent of shell and mowed lanes in the advancing ranks. Then the flood of men would be checked as the incoming tide may be checked by a rock. With a surge and a swirl it would sweep right round the obstacle, pushing ever forward. In some places the German artillery opened a *feu de barrage* on the French trenches, but nearly always their fire came too late: the wave of men had passed.

A spurt across the open ground, and they were on the German wire entanglements. Once these defences had been formidable enough, but now they had been torn to pieces by high explosives, their stakes broken and the wire cut and torn. The Germans had done their best to strengthen them by heaving coils of barbed wire from the shelter of their trenches into the confusion caused by the shells, but with it all the entanglements were no obstacle to stop determined men. One more rush, and the French were on the parapets of the German trenches. At the first glance they saw the

havoc wrought by the French projectiles. The trenches were no longer tenable. The explosion of huge *marmites* had levelled the parapets and half filled the trenches, until they were no more than shallow ditches, burying deep in them men and material, while as for the Boches who had taken refuge in the *trous de renard*, they were suffocating under feet of earth and débris. The French grenadiers, looking down from above on the flat grey caps, hurled on their devoted heads a deadly rain of grenades. Some attempted to fly along the communication trenches, but in vain, for the narrowness of the trenches and their complicated windings made swift progress impossible, while the French on the open ground above leapt from trench to trench and smote them at their own free will. In a few minutes along a front of fifteen miles the French had broken their way into the first line of the German defences, while their gunners had lengthened their fuses and were pounding away at the enemy's positions in the rear.

As the infantry advanced they planted their tricolour *fanions* on each mound and hill they carried, to show their position to the gunners in the rear. In ancient days the colours of a regiment fulfilled this function and were planted on the captured ground as a sign of victory. Time and tradition have given to the colours so sacred a symbolical value that they are never risked in the forefront of battle, and more humble symbols now perform a duty that has in modern warfare become indispensable.

As was to be expected, along a front of fifteen miles, on which some four German army corps were engaged, the natural and artificial difficulties with which the assailants had to contend differed very considerably.

West of Souain there once existed a windmill. After the battle there only remained of it a shapeless collection of shattered timber. Here for months previously mine warfare had been going on. The French succeeded in exploding a very large mine under the German trenches and opening in them an enormous funnel-shaped crater deep enough to bury a four-storey house. They were, however, unable to occupy the crater, which remained in German hands. Another crater, just in front of it, was neutral and inaccessible to either side, while a crater behind formed part of the French position. Here the lines were in places only a few yards apart, and the French advanced, climbing like mountaineers in one of those bare volcanic regions where no living thing has grown since the beginning of the world. Keeping to the upper ground, the men scrambled along the narrow ridges between the craters, hurling their grenades on the Germans in the hollows. Their work was well done. When they had passed the great crater was full of German corpses, struck down in every attitude of terror and surprise. "The most tragic sight," said an officer to me, "that I have seen during the war!"

A little to the east, just off the high-road from Souain to Somme-Py, which is the *route nationale* from Nevers to Sedan, the lines were rather farther apart. The French had about 150 yards of open ground to cross before they reached the underground fortresses known as the Palatinate and Magdeburg positions. Here they had before them a system of trenches, scientifically organised and linked together, which the enemy regarded as impregnable. Despite the strength of the main position and its network of support and flanking trenches, the French artillery had done its

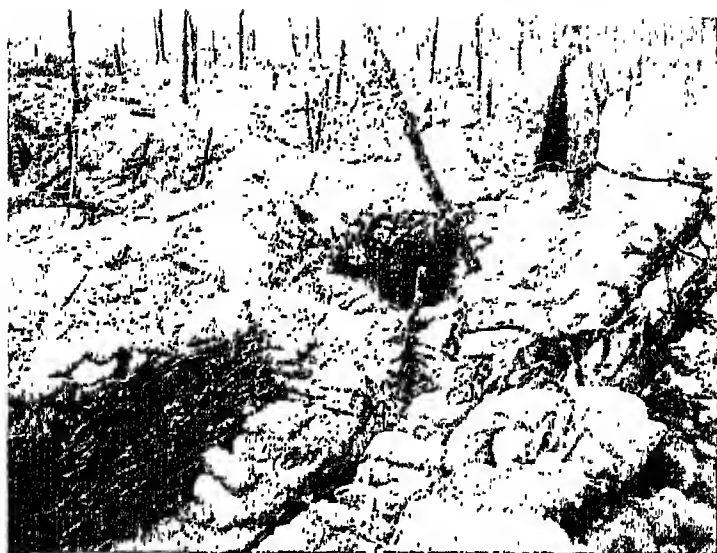
work, and the infantry swept over the barrier as if it had been non-existent, slaying as they went.

It was in the Cuvette de Souain that the division commanded by General Marchand was stationed. With his name the battle of Champagne will always be connected, and England is proud to pay homage to a soldier whom, in the days of Fashoda, she knew as a very courteous and loyal man of war, and whom to-day she can venerate as a gallant ally and a magnificent leader of men. After his division had so brilliantly carried forward its trenches to within 300 yards of the Germans, General de Langle de Cary, commanding the army, came to visit the famous *place d'armes* known as the "Place de l'Opéra," capable of sheltering a battalion. There, before his troops, General Marchand declared: "*Mon général*, on the day of the attack within an hour we shall reach Navarin Farm!"

Navarin Farm, which was the objective of his division, lies on the summit of the plateau between Souain and Somme-Py. To reach it his men had to fight their way through two miles of German trenches and fortifications. Nevertheless they made it a point of honour to make good their general's promise, and within an hour they had swept over the "Tranchée des Gretchen," as the soldiers called it, the last trench between them and the farm. It was in this glorious attack that General Marchand was seriously wounded. Brave to a fault, he was everywhere where there was danger, and where his men needed the encouragement of his presence. Motoring regularly up to Souain over a road continually swept by German guns, he supervised the whole work of preparation, and one night, fearing that his guns were bombarding deserted

trenches, he made his way, with a few Colonials, into the German lines. He fell, struck by a splinter of shell, at the head of his troops, whom, with his pipe in his mouth and his stick in his hand, he was leading to the assault of the enemy's trenches.

A struggle of a rather different kind took place round the woods of the Trou Bricot, just north of Perthes. Here the Germans had filled the woods with their usual complicated organisation of trenches for forest warfare, and had converted a salient of their position, known to the French as "La Poche," into a perfect labyrinth of trenches and "dug-outs," with barbed wire in every available spot. The men who charged on this part of the front belonged to regiments recruited in Savoy and Dauphiné. Their advance was so rapid that in seventeen minutes they had captured "La Poche" and were half a mile forward in the woods beyond. They had no time to comment on the extraordinary appearance of the ground over which they were passing, but they must at least have been conscious of the physical effort needed to make any headway across a piece of country that the burrowings of the invader and the explosion of countless shells had converted into something more rugged and desolate than a desert of the moon. Yet they went at the double over every obstacle, carried the trenches in the woods beyond, captured guns that should have been playing on them at the moment they left their trenches, and reached a German village settled peacefully in the depths of the forests. The enemy was very proud of this makeshift village, and had made himself there quarters which were both comfortable and picturesque. The sides of the officers' quarters were covered with soft green moss,



IN "THE POCKET" SALIENT.
(Battle of Champagne, September, 1915.)



THE CHAMPAGNE POUILLEUSE.

and their thatched roofs were provided with real chimneys, that sprang out of the ground like unnatural fungi. There was even an arbour, in which the officer might drink his beer and be secure from the sight of the common soldier, since his quarters were cut off from the rest of the village by two rustic gates.

That morning two officers were placidly enjoying the delights of a morning in bed, when they were disturbed by noises which it was beyond their wits to account for. The door of their little house was rudely thrust open, and excited voices said rude things in French. Then bayonets made their appearance, and soldiers, hot and breathing hard after their steeplechase across the German trenches, pulled the officers from their beds with scant respect, informing them briefly that they were prisoners. This was the first information which the stupefied officers received that the French had broken through their lines. It was in this charge that several 105-millimetre guns were captured, with their officers and men. Such was the rapidity of the French onslaught that the breaks in its continuity caused by a more stubborn German resistance affected it not at all. The "Bois Sabot," so called because on the map it has an outline not unlike a wooden shoe, had a Maxim or two that had escaped destruction, and its works repelled the first attack. All that happened was that the Colonials swept past it on one side, the Savoyards on the other, and eventually met at a point some miles behind it. The Bois Sabot was surrounded, and the next day there was nothing for the Germans who held it to do but surrender.

A few small detachments of French cavalry succeeded in coming into action, and one squadron captured a

considerable number of prisoners. Elsewhere, however, the cavalymen soon discovered that their day had not yet come, and dismounting, pushed home their attack on foot. The artillery kept pace with the French advance, and batteries for the first time for months came out of their hiding-places into the open and galloped forward to take up new positions behind the advancing troops. For those who for so long had been fretting in the trenches nothing was stranger than the sudden sense of new-won liberty. A man might walk with impunity in places where, since the battle of the Marne, it would have been certain death to show oneself. Roads that could only be passed at night became open to every kind of traffic throughout the day, and the whole countryside seemed to be entirely changed since the days when a man could only make his way through that particular portion of it with his head below the level of the earth.

On October 3rd General Joffre summed up the results of the battle in the following order of the day :—

“ GENERAL HEADQUARTERS.

“ The Commander-in-Chief addresses to the troops under his orders his expression of deep satisfaction for the results so far obtained by their attack.

“ Twenty-five thousand prisoners, including 350 officers, 150 guns, and quantities of material that have not yet been enumerated, are the trophies of a victory the fame of which has rung through Europe.

“ None of the sacrifices so gladly suffered have been in vain. All have worked together towards the accomplishment of the common task.

“ The present is for us a certain guarantee of the future.

“ The Commander-in-Chief is proud of commanding the finest troops that France has ever known.

“ J. JOFFE.”

The story of the battle of Champagne was told me on the battlefield itself by a staff officer who had taken part in it. At that time no civilian except M. Clemenceau had visited the scene of the great offensive, and the white earth of the Champagne Pouilleuse was still hideous with the havoc and chaos of war. As for the German trenches, across which we scrambled as best we could, they retained no more semblance of their form after the French bombardment than a child's sand castle after the first waves of the incoming tide have passed over it. Trenches which once were seven or eight feet deep were then shallow ditches which would scarcely give cover to a kneeling man. The shelters had disappeared under masses of earth, and how many Germans hidden in them died a slow and lingering death of asphyxiation no one will ever know. Days after the battle a few scared, starving creatures were brought out of them still alive, and never were soldiers more delighted to find themselves in an enemy's hands. Here and there corpses were lying as they had fallen, some of them the corpses of French soldiers who had fallen between the lines in the spring offensive six months before.

The Champagne Pouilleuse, a barren desert of chalk, with here and there a naked fir wood stripped of half its trees and all its branches by high explosives, is a country of distant views. Its undulating hills run up to a height of 500 or 600 feet, and between them one has glimpses of hills behind and melancholy woods, until it seems that the bare, monotonous landscape must reach to the end of the world. The air was quivering incessantly with the noise of guns. Sometimes each individual shot

would be lost in a general deafening roar, and sometimes the sound would hull a little so that one could distinguish its component parts.

The line of the German trenches where they lay by the village of Tahure was marked by great columns of white smoke that slowly drifted eastward. The French in the advanced lines were making liberal use of aerial torpedoes, which carry a heavy charge of explosives. These torpedoes had played no small part in destroying the German underground fortresses over which we were walking. Here and there some of them which had failed to explode were still sticking in the chalk, ugly fat cases of explosives with twisted metal wings that suggested some unspeakable reptiles which had tried and failed to fly. It was not only long distance fighting that was going on in the front trenches, as was shown by the cases full of grenades, neatly packed like bottles, that were being carried forward.

One of the most striking features of the great advance in Champagne was the magnificent fashion in which the field artillery kept up with the onrush of the infantry. As the infantry swept over the German trenches the 75's came out of the holes in which they had been buried for months, and in a few minutes were galloping over the ground which their shells had torn up so thoroughly, crossing the trenches on bridges of fir trunks, which had been prepared for the purpose, and taking up their positions ever nearer the enemy. Very different was the case of the German artillery. Their fire, intended to stop the French advance, was badly aimed, and their shells were wasted. They were still firing and making useless holes in barren ground when the French infantry, which had advanced at a

speed that defied all human calculation, fell upon their gunners with the bayonet.

For a time then the French 75's pounded away over the infantry's heads from positions exposed and unconcealed. Then, when the enemy had sullenly fallen back on his second line of defence, the artillery had once again to take to earth. When I was there caissons were being brought up over the open ground, conveying the ammunition which previously had to pass through the congested communication trenches, but nearly all the batteries had disappeared into shelters carefully contrived beneath the ground. Here and there artillerymen were at work concealing their pieces from discovery by a hostile aeroplane. As for the pieces that were firing, they were so well concealed that one came suddenly upon them, and the only warning that one had was an ear-splitting salvo, which seemed to come out of the ground immediately beneath one's feet.

At the edge of the poor mangled woods the shock of the angry detonations made the shattered branches rattle on their brown naked trunks like the bones of a skeleton. Looking further afield, one might see flash after flash, bright like the rays of the setting sun on a distant window-pane, and a second or two later the sharp reports would float down the wind, but these flashes were all that the eye could perceive of the incessant cannonade.

Meantime the Germans, though they were firing more slowly, were searching blindly for the French batteries. Sometimes the whirr of the shell would increase in volume instead of gradually dying away towards the enemy's line, until an explosion not so far

away told us that it was a projectile from the Germans. Their shells seemed to have a wonderful faculty for finding empty ground. Sometimes a wounded man, with head or arm bound up, would walk past us towards the ambulance, showing that occasionally a German shell had not been so far from its mark, but never were they able to find the batteries for which they were spasmodically seeking. Once near a ruined house three shells in quick succession came unpleasantly near to a group of men with whom we were talking, but their real target was a mile or two away—a biplane sailing majestically home after a reconnaissance, while the Germans saluted it with a salvo of their field guns, which missed it completely and nearly hit us.

With the 75's perhaps one does not fully realise that the present war is a war of machines. There is something human about them, and they do not utterly dwarf the men who are serving them. It is when one comes to the heavy artillery that the human element seems—though, of course, quite erroneously—to be non-existent. Throughout the fighting in Champagne the heavy guns played an all-important part. Guided by the all-seeing aeroplane, they wrecked ammunition and store depôts and railway lines far away in the German rear, spreading confusion and depriving the front trenches of reinforcements in men and munitions. So effective was their fire that in several cases prisoners were taken who for forty-eight hours had received no fresh supplies of provisions or ammunition.

We came upon the heavy guns that were bombarding the trenches near Tahure behind a precipitous hill, over which their projectiles were flying with a portentous din. The bombardment was not yet at its height, and

some of the pieces were resting, hidden with tarpaulins, which straggled over the ground as if they were covering gigantic spiders. Others were at work, a battery or two of long Rimailhos, 105's (4'1-inch) and 155's (6'1-inch), looking very tall and smart and deadly as they made the ground quiver with their salvoes. The Rimailho was in appearance a gentleman in comparison with the 220 (8'6-inch) howitzers—evil black machines, as uncanny as Mr. Wells's Martians, which seemed to be hurling their projectiles vertically upwards. The 220's were hard at work, and one after the other in steady succession they vomited out fire and smoke like dwarfed, misshapen dragons.

But of all these hideous engines the most hideous and most unnatural was the enormous fifteen-inch howitzer. It stood apart from all the lesser monsters in a lair of its own, and it seemed to move of its own volition. One scarcely noticed the men around it, so insignificant did they seem. When we first saw it, it was lying flat, like some prehistoric monster waiting for its prey. With the aid of pulleys and a trolley, the huge projectile was hauled towards its breech. Then, when the breech was closed, it seemed to wake up, and without any visible human agency it raised its nose over the edge of the pit in which it lived. It moved slowly upwards until one could have sworn that it was gazing intently into the clouds above the steep hillside before it. The men who had been ministering to it hastily ran aside and left a respectful distance between themselves and the monster. The non-commissioned officer who was to fire the great howitzer, as he stood back on the hillside, seemed no more important than its humblest slave.

There was a silence. Instinctively one stopped one's

ears. There was a great roar, a sheet of flame, and a thin mist of fiercely driven smoke. Everything in the valley shook and trembled, while a hut covered with a tarpaulin collapsed entirely, as with a wild bellowing the huge shell tore through the air on its way towards the enemy. Then quietly the gun lowered its nose again, and sank back into its pit with a dignified swagger that seemed to say that there was no reason to make a fuss about the matter. An officer who was standing by me remarked: "It is just as if it had blown out a puff of tobacco smoke and could not think why anybody should be excited about it!"

Later on we went up to the hills above, and from there we could get some idea of the havoc that the monsters in the valley below were working. In the trenches near the observation station we met the General, who remarked: "*Nous sommes en train de les marmiter.* They have been annoying us!" And the grim tone in which he said it suggested that the Germans were going to be even more annoyed. As we looked over the parapet of the trenches we could hear the heavy report of the guns and the whirr of the big shells as they passed over our heads. Then it would seem as if a volcano had opened in the German trenches as, with a dull explosion, a black cone of smoke and earth was blown up into the air. We had only to think of the ruin that we had seen in the captured lines to realise what was happening over there in the distance. Every now and then the Germans would reply angrily, trying to locate the French trenches in the hillside facing us. A particular bare patch of ground, on which there was neither trench nor tree nor any living thing, seemed to have incurred their special spite. Simultaneously

three *marmiles* burst over it, and they were quickly followed by a hail of time shells, which flashed brightly as they burst some fifty feet above the white soil.

Meantime the French were hammering away with a terrible methodical steadiness, tearing the enemy's trenches to pieces and opening a way for their infantry through Tahure to the Butte de Tahure, which was captured a few days later.

It is now a military axiom that no offensive can hope for any serious measure of success unless at least three months have been devoted to its preparation. Far more has been written about the destructive side of modern warfare than about that constructive organisation behind the lines which in time of peace would be regarded as a miracle of scientific order and progress, and on which the issue of a battle must depend. "In the rear," said General Gouraud, commanding the Army of Champagne, to me, "you will see, as it were, the body of our forces, while in the front trenches you can only see the fist that strikes. In my opinion the body is far more interesting and has far greater variety than the fist!"

It is on the organisation behind the lines that the efforts of the General commanding and the first bureau of his general staff must be concentrated during those weeks of preparation. Miles of railways, both of normal and narrow gauge, must be constructed, to bring up men, ammunition, provisions, material of all kinds. The whole road system of the country must be altered and improved, and depôts of ammunition, provisions, etc., and workshops of all descriptions must be established throughout the countryside.

In Champagne the organisation behind the lines was

a model of its kind. An officer of the first bureau of the staff of the Champagne Army who played a prominent part in providing that army with a perfect system of commissariat and communication, spoke of his work with a pride that an artist might take in a *chef-d'œuvre*. "It would have been such a pleasure to us," he said, "if only the Boches had decided to make their great offensive here, instead of at Verdun! It would have given us the chance of putting our system to a practical test, and we are really sorry that the chance has not yet been given us. However, one day it may come, and we have absolute confidence in our work."

The backbone of the organisation behind the lines is a railway system scientifically prepared to meet every possible emergency. The Champagne Pouilleuse was for all practical purposes a desert. Thinly populated, with villages few and far between, roads as a rule bad and scarce, drinking water almost unobtainable, the Champagne Pouilleuse only lends itself to the movements of troops in so far as its surface is concerned. If it were not for the absence of material resources it would be an ideal manœuvre ground, but as things are the French in fighting there have had to meet all the difficulties of colonial warfare.

The most remarkable achievement of the French military engineers is undoubtedly the network of railway lines that now covers the barren countryside. First of all one may take the lines of normal gauge. The French had at their disposal in this district the line which ran through Somme-Suippe, Somme-Tourbe, and Somme-Bionne, known as the line of the Sommes. Before the battle of Champagne, in September, 1915, it

was possible that this line might be cut by the enemy's long range fire, and consequently it was doubled by another ordinary gauge line well out of the enemy's reach. As a matter of fact, during the offensive the line of the Sommes was able to work uninterruptedly, as the Germans were far too busy checking the French advance to spare either time or ammunition for the railway line in the rear.

These two lines formed, as it were, a double backbone to the French organisation in Champagne. They were linked up to one another and to the front trenches by a complete network of light railways on the Decauville system (two-foot gauge). All about over the bare Champagne slopes funny little two-funnelled engines, puffing and blowing with two or three trucks behind them, were to be seen, and when they were outlined against the horizon their revolving wheels produced a weird suggestion of some many-legged prehistoric caterpillar. Sometimes, for an important line of communications, the track was carefully levelled, so that there were no steep gradients, and the toy engine could pull veritable trains of trucks, carrying each some eight or nine tons of material. In one case a double line was laid down, to facilitate the revictualling of a specially important point. Generally speaking, however, the lines were laid down in the way best calculated to save time and labour, and the engines went meandering through the fields in the most unexpected way, avoiding a steep gradient by a tremendous loop and carefully following the best line of cover.

These light railways were so arranged that, if the ordinary line of the Somme were cut, their communications with the doubling line behind would not be

interrupted, and material could still be brought up to the trenches in a continuous stream.

Several hundred miles of these light railways were laid down in Champagne, and the question of their upkeep and extension was not the lightest of the burdens that had to be borne by the first bureau of the Staff. At first these lines were laid down hurriedly and practically without ballast, but afterwards they were relaid and ballasted, and now, despite the shifting Champagne mud, they are really solidly constructed. Owing to the soil, they had often to be laid on fascines, and it is one of the ironies of the Champagne Pouilleuse that water was one of the chief enemies with which the military engineers had to contend, and that at the same time, to obtain drinking water for the troops, they had occasionally to bore as deep as 180 feet.

I went for a short journey in one of these trains, and was much impressed by the facility and smoothness with which it ran from the main railway station to the subsidiary stations forming the various dépôts. We threaded our way through a continuous series of little tents and huts containing thousands and thousands of heavy artillery projectiles. An ammunition dépôt of this kind formed of itself a large village. After ammunition we came to a big sawmill, engaged in cutting planks for the engineers. Next was a water station, where water tanks could be loaded up with the least possible delay and exertion from the wells that had been sunk in the chalk. The crossing of the main road provided an important junction, where goods of every kind could be shifted to or from automobile or horse-drawn vehicles.

The scene reminded one of those stories of American

towns which spring up mushroom-like in a night and a day. Wherever the line passed large villages—almost continuous, until they practically formed a huge town—were suddenly brought into existence by the French engineers in a country that had been quite unpopulated and could boast before the war only a few small villages, built generally on the banks of one of the three streams of the Champagne Pouilleuse.

The most surprising feature of these light railways was the audacity with which they had been pushed forward into close proximity with the front trenches, only 100 yards or so from the enemy. It was not good for the trains to go too near the front during the day-time, as unfortunately the white smoke of the engines provided the German gunners with an easy target. At night their task was easier, but even then it was only in certain places that it was safe for them to remain stationary. However, the engine-drivers regarded German shells with the greatest equanimity. If a rail or two was torn up, it could be replaced in the twinkling of an eye, and any considerable interruption of traffic could only be accomplished by a very heavy sustained bombardment.

Speaking generally, the ordinary traffic from the rear to the firing zone passed over the Decauville railways I have been describing, while motor transport was reserved for cases of emergency and for supplementary requirements. A motor lorry can carry, on an average, about three tons, while a single Decauville truck will carry about three times as much; and the difficulty of keeping up the roads for the motor lorries is infinitely greater than that of maintaining a light railway track. Of course, if there came from the front a

sudden urgent demand for extra ammunition, the motor lorries would at once be invaluable, as they were at Verdun, but as a general rule the light railway has very considerable advantages over the automobile.

Thanks to this system, railhead is now often practically in the front line trenches, if only the ground will provide sufficient cover. Failing cover, the two-foot gauge line can be supplemented in the trenches themselves by sixteen-inch gauge rails and hand-drawn trucks. These rails can be laid without difficulty in the communication trenches, and increase a man's working power many times. It is estimated that one man, with a truck mounted on these rails, can do as much work in the way of hauling up ammunition, material, and so forth, as twenty-five or thirty men could do without this mechanical aid. The difficulty of carrying heavy loads along the narrow winding trenches is obvious, and it appeared likely when I was in Champagne that as time went on the main trench arteries would almost all be provided with rails.

A military station where the ordinary and the Decauville lines meet behind the front is a curious and interesting spectacle. I visited such a station, which provides for the revictualling of 40,000 men, in Champagne. There was very little about it to suggest the civilian's ordinary notion of a railway station. It was unenclosed and roofless, and the only building was a small wooden hut, in which everything that was received and everything that was given out to the army commissariat officers was checked.

The platform consisted of a long bank raised some four feet above the railway, slimy with mud and

covered with what seemed an inextricable mess of carts and horses. The mud was bad enough on the platform, but it was infinitely worse on the fields beyond it, where, as there was not place for everything on the platform, several hundred commissariat waggons had taken up their position. There was just room for one cart to pass another on the platform, and it took miracles of good driving and no little tact and common-sense on the part of the gendarmes regulating the traffic to prevent everything being blocked in hopeless confusion.

A long line of goods trucks, sufficient to provide the daily needs of 40,000 men, had been run in alongside the platform, and everyone was hard at work loading the commissariat carts with all that was needed by the troops. There were trucks of hay and straw, oats, firewood, and coal, and thousands of *rondins*—the logs used for the making of the roads throughout the Champagne Pouilleuse, since they afford a foundation which will keep above the mud. Not the least important of the trucks was a postal van, round which men had gathered with the greatest eagerness to see what parcels and letters had been sent to them from home.

There were several truck-loads of bread, fresh and appetising. The distribution of the bread was an exception to the general system. As a rule all provisions were sent direct from railhead to the troops. As, however, every division had in reserve three days' supplies with the divisional convoys and three days' supplies with the regimental convoys, the bread in these reserves had to be changed from time to time before it grew too stale for human consumption. Consequently every few days the convoys distributed among

the troops their stocks of bread and then obtained from the station fresh bread to be held in reserve.

The railway station was at a junction with a two-foot Decauville, and was the starting point of half a dozen small gauge lines. Provisions, as a rule, as I have said, were taken off by horse-drawn carts. Sometimes, however, a couple of trucks on the Decauville were devoted to them, when men in particularly awkward positions at the front had to be revictualled. Wounded men were rarely brought back by the light railways. Sometimes a man or two, only slightly wounded, might be brought down from the front on an ordinary truck, but as a general rule they were left to the motor ambulances. However, trucks were being prepared specially for the transport of the wounded on these Decauville railways.

The main business of the light railway was ammunition and material for the engineers. As soon as the ammunition reached the station it was loaded on the Decauville trucks. With surprising rapidity a small engine was attached and steamed off gaily to a neighbouring ammunition dépôt, where some twenty or thirty men were awaiting its arrival. The trucks stopped exactly opposite the sheds where the shells were stored, and in a comparatively few minutes they had all disappeared inside, beneath a roof artistically painted on the outside with protective colouring, to escape the aviator's eye.

Each calibre of gun had its own particular shed. In the first shed one might see rows of six-inch shells neatly arranged, thousands of them together, ready to be sent forward to the front at a moment's notice. They were painted an ugly yellow colour, and were of

several shapes and types. In another shed were to be found hundreds of deadly-looking eight-inch projectiles, even uglier than the smaller shell. "What beautiful shells!" said an artillery officer who was showing me round. "It makes me quite happy to see them and think what they will give the Boches. There is nothing in the world like a good eight-inch shell!"

Suppose for a moment there is an alarm somewhere up among the hills in the north, and orders are sent down for several thousand rounds to be brought up immediately. A word at the telephone, and a little train with its absurd engine will be up in front of the sheds. In a few minutes the trucks will be loaded and off to carry fresh food to the big guns that are stirring up the Germans some fifteen or twenty miles away. Thanks to organisation, not a minute is wasted.

Alongside the principal railway station of which I have been speaking was a large clearing hospital, which the medical officer in charge explained to me was to be regarded as a mere waiting room. It consisted of a series of sheds, some with benches for the more slightly injured, others with beds for the more seriously wounded. There was a makeshift operating room, so that in case of urgency operations could be performed, but as a general rule the purpose of the hospital was to sort out the wounded. Previously it had been a heavy drain on the effectives that men suffering from insignificant injuries or ailments had to be transferred to the interior, where they would probably pass several months before they rejoined their units.

All slight cases were despatched at once to neighbouring ambulances by motor-car, and they were able to rejoin with a minimum of delay. Certain serious

cases, too, for which a train journey might be dangerous, were treated at special hospitals in the army zone. The men who had to be evacuated to the hospitals of the interior were transferred directly from the ambulance to a hospital train, which drew up opposite its gates. These trains provided accommodation for 350 wounded and were staffed with nurses and doctors. This system gave excellent results, and it is likely that in future hospital trains will be utilised even more generally than they have been in the past.

Railways were not by any means the only problem which had to be solved by the first bureau of the French general staff in Champagne. After building fresh lines of normal gauge and constructing hundreds of miles of narrow gauge line, the bureau had to face the question of roads. In the Champagne Pouilleuse this question was particularly difficult. Such roads as there were were bad, owing to the nature of the soil, and they were necessarily few and far between in so impoverished and so sparsely populated a district. Here again the military engineers went to work on a rational plan. A general scheme was drawn up to provide the army with all the highways necessary for its communications. Since the Champagne mud was capable of swallowing up tons of stones without any apparent effect, the new roads were laid on logs wherever the foundation was bad. These corduroy roads have performed inestimable services ; and, thanks to their existence, it was possible to bring up heavy artillery across a perfect sea of mud. They are kept as well as is possible in the circumstances. The tremendous strain upon them inevitably makes them far from ideal from the point of view of the motorist,



ENTRANCE TO UNDERGROUND SHELTER IN CHAMPAGNE.

but they are perfectly passable both for automobile and horse-drawn vehicles. Mud is really a minor matter so long as the convoys can pass.

Motor transport is essentially an emergency service. It renders, of course, invaluable service in the daily round of trench warfare, but it is only when the emergency comes that its enormous importance can be fully realised. What it can do in such circumstances was shown at Verdun. As soon as an additional strain is placed on any of the transport services it is to the automobiles that the high command turns, and the supplementary assistance thus given to the railways may have incalculable effects on the result of a battle.

It is no small business to keep in order the motor-cars of an army. In Champagne this department needed some 6,000 men, and it was organised in such a way as to be as self-supporting as possible. Thus the motor repair dépôts had their own clothing and postal arrangements. They had their own cobblers and their own special transport to bring up material. The principle on which they were worked was that of a large commercial establishment. To direct them the French chose men who were accustomed to controlling and managing important firms, and everything was organised on a strictly commercial basis.

In one of the *parcs d'automobiles* that I visited the officer in command, once the head of a very large metallurgical company, told me that his present duties were simply those of the managing director of a motor business with an average turnover of about £500,000 a year. "In such an affair," he said, "simplicity is essential. So far as possible each army specialises in a certain make of motors, so that difficulties concerning

spare parts and the like may be reduced to a minimum. Of course, with the eighty odd touring cars attached to the Staff, and the several thousand lorries for which we are responsible, every make is necessarily represented, and we are bound to be ready to repair and refit cars of every description. But our speciality is the X. lorry, and we have special machinery for dealing with all repairs required by that particular make."

The card index was very largely used in the organisation of these motor repair depôts, and it was by this system that track was kept not only of every car that entered or left the workshop, but also of every tyre and spare part that was sent out. Every car in the army had its card, on which was inscribed its career and adventures: how on a certain date it broke a wheel, how a month or two later it received a small shell splinter in its radiator, and how eventually, declared past all provisional repair, it was sent back to its manufacturer to see whether anything could still be done with it.

A reserve of motor cars and lorries was kept ready for service day and night, so that any automobile brought in injured could be immediately replaced. In this matter the duties of the officer commanding the automobile dépôt demanded a good deal of tact and experience. During the repairs he was able to a certain extent to redistribute his fleet. Thus occasionally he could replace a high-powered car with one of smaller horse-power, if he considered that the work which the car would be called on to perform could in this way be done at smaller expense. "It is just as well," he remarked, "from time to time to refuse to

replace a car at all, if one knows that it is not urgently needed, as in that way the mechanics are discouraged from bringing their cars here too often ! ”

Spare parts and tyres were indexed just like the cars themselves, so that at any time the man in charge of the department knew exactly how many parts he had in stock. A general classification of the terms most widely accepted for these parts in the motor trade was made at the beginning of the war, as considerable confusion was caused by the fact that many parts of a motor-car are known to chauffeurs by three or four different technical names, as well as by additional slang terms. The vocabulary thus formed was posted up, and each part had only one official name, and by this it had to be called when a request for it was made.

The spare parts were divided up between various sheds on the following principle. One lot of sheds was reserved for the spare parts required by the special make of car which formed the greater part of that particular motor fleet, and in a second lot of sheds there were stored parts that would fit any make of car. When a chauffeur came in with a damaged car he had to write out on a memorandum form the nature of the repairs needed and the cause of the damage. If it was a case of structural deficiency, the manufacturer was responsible and was promptly called upon to make good the defect. If the damage was due to an accident, the matter was referred to the chauffeur's military chiefs, and he was required to give an adequate explanation of its causes. If the motor-car had suffered in the ordinary course of wear and tear, the chauffeur's memorandum was passed on, just as if it were an order

in a big shop. It went straight to the department concerned, which noted down on the card index that such and such a part had been delivered to such and such a car on such and such a date, and the piece, if not essential to the running of the car, was sent to the chauffeur's quarters by the special delivery service. The system was exactly the same for a pneumatic tyre, and the general principle was that a man must return an old part or an old tyre before he could obtain a new one.

The extension of the work done by the *parcs d'automobiles* was so great that a printing press had been installed on the premises, and was effecting a saving, I was assured, of well over a thousand a year.

The chauffeurs attached to the army were carefully tested, and if they appeared in any way unequal to their task they were promptly sent to go through a course in a driving school attached to the *parc d'automobiles*. Here they were thoroughly taught their business, and if they continued to show insufficient aptitude they were sent away to perform other military duties. The automobile repair depôts behind the firing line were as a rule more or less permanent installations. They had repair outfit cars attached to them which could be sent to any point, but it was found better to do all work so far as possible well in the rear, where there were plenty of machine tools at the workmen's disposal and where the possibility of a sudden move had not always to be considered. In some cases the depôts were installed in such buildings as factories or barracks, and of course in these cases comparatively little work had to be done in equipping them. Occasionally they were established in fields or on waste grounds, and there wooden sheds were run up with great rapidity and proved

extremely satisfactory. There was an abundance of machine tools of every kind required, and indeed one of the difficulties with which the officer in charge had to contend was the question how far it was worth his while to undertake complicated repairs instead of sending the cars back to the manufacturer. When the pressure of work was not very heavy, great ingenuity was displayed in combining the best parts of two injured cars, so as to make a single satisfactory automobile, and there was no reason at all why motor-cars should not be built on the premises, if occasion required.

It was when the news of an offensive came in that the dépôt set to work at full blast. Then every car was mobilised, including the reserves, and sent post-haste to perform the duties imposed upon it by the General Staff. Slight repairs were done at lightning speed, and it was the pride of the mechanics that the smallest percentage possible of their lorries should be disabled for their important work of bringing up to the firing line both men and munitions. Verdun showed what the French motor lorries could do.

In modern war there are many machines beside motor-cars which need prompt repairs, and the most important of these is the "75" gun. It was in a village a few miles behind the front lines that we came upon a field "75" repair dépôt.

"You have come to visit the front?" asked a major who received us as we left our motor-car. He rather demurred to the reply that we gave, that it was not so much the front that we were anxious to see as the services of the rear. "You can hardly call this the rear," he said, "when you hear all that noise of guns!" We compromised with the suggestion that his post was

to be described either as the front of the rear or else as the rear of the front. In any case, the "75" repair depôt which was under his command was well within the range of the German guns.

It started as a mere field workshop, capable of doing no more than the casual obvious repairs needed by the "75" gun on active service. It was not expected to cope with really serious damage, which was left to the good offices of the gun hospitals in the rear. However, like a number of other field depôts, it had grown enormously in size and efficiency since the beginning of the war. Trench warfare had made it no longer necessary for it to be perpetually on the move. Originally all its material had to be packed on a few carts, and the depôt had to be kept ever on the heels of a swiftly moving army. Now, however, it had had the leisure to take premises of its own, and to supplement its former simple equipment with a number of more complicated tools.

The premises consisted of a number of farm buildings, which had lent themselves excellently to the work required of them. The ingenious officer in charge of the depôt had had his eyes open for anything abandoned in the deserted villages of the fighting zone that might prove serviceable. Engines of all kinds, left by their proprietors in their flight before the Germans, had proved useful in hundreds of unsuspected ways, and had been adapted by the ingenuity of the French engineers to many valuable purposes. Sometimes the recovery of these machines from a point where they were within range of the enemy's fire had furnished abundant material for heroic effort.

There was once a threshing engine just behind the

first line of trenches which attracted the covetous eye of a certain engineer officer, who told me the story. It was standing in some farm buildings, most of which had been knocked to pieces by the enemy's shell; but by one of those fantastic freaks of chance common in this war the wall of the shed that hid it from the enemy was still untouched, and the engine was intact. It was only a few yards from the shed door to the high-road, and the engineer officer vowed to carry the engine out of the German range, thinking with glee of the many useful services to which he could apply it. The first thing was to borrow a gun team, the second to find a few reckless spirits like himself.

When night fell they carefully prepared a path from the shed down to the road. Then they brought their horses, with feet muffled in sacks, from the rear, and harnessed them to a long rope, of which the further end was firmly fastened to the engine. The horses' feet were then unmuffled. A few cautious tugs brought the engine out of the shed down a little incline into the road. The commotion roused the Boche sentinels, and a star shell soon threw a far too vivid light on the proceedings. There was no further need for concealment; and the artillery horses, urged to their utmost with whip and spur, dashed off at a wild gallop along the road, while, creaking and groaning and swaying, there followed behind them the threshing engine. What impression the horses' hoofs made on the Germans in their trenches it is impossible to say. They probably thought it was a cavalry charge. At any rate, they passed a wakeful night, breaking continually into intermittent bursts of firing, while the engine, unscathed, was carried out of jeopardy into a place of safety, where it was soon after-

wards furnishing the motive power for an electric light installation.

The repair dépôt which I visited possessed two small motors, of which its officer was inordinately proud. It had even managed to stock itself with machine tools, and the field of activity had been immensely extended since the days when it was always on the move. Not but what it could move, if occasion required, for it possessed its own motor transport, and all its belongings could be packed up in a minimum of time.

In the main building, a large barn, all the woodwork required for the repair of commissariat carts was done. Skilled wheelwrights were at work making wheels, and a fine display of shafts and poles proved the efficiency of the makeshift establishment.

In the courtyard the field kitchens, which have over and over again proved their immense value in providing the weary men in the firing line with hot food, were being repaired. It was not only that wheels and shafts had been broken, but if a cook were careless and stoked his fire too high, there would be every chance of his burning out his firebox. The field dépôt, wherever possible, repaired the firebox or replaced it by an uninjured firebox from an otherwise damaged kitchen.

In a neighbouring shed was a "75" repairing shop. Here most ordinary repairs could be done efficiently, with an immense saving of time, and a gun must be badly damaged indeed—say, for instance, have had part of its barrel removed by a shell—for it to be necessary to send it to the factory in the rear. During some of the hard fighting this dépôt proved itself capable of repairing from two to three guns a day and sending them back to the front within twenty-four hours.

In these field depôts the various ingenious ideas invented by the men using such weapons as the "75" were being applied and developed, provided that they did not require alterations of too radical a character. Often a simple notion suggested by practice was the cause of saving many lives and doubled efficiency. The French soldier has a special gift for discovering what he calls "the egg of Columbus"—that is, those simple, obvious devices which seem to stare one in the face and yet are so hardly found.

The machine-gun, of which the use in trench warfare has become more and more extended, had its own shed, where experts repaired it and tuned it up to the utmost pitch of perfection. The officer in charge here was particularly proud of the success of his men in this delicate work, and was prepared to back the machine-guns that he had tended against perfectly new ones just out of the factory. "Warranted never to jam!" he said contentedly as he pointed to a phalanx of them that had just passed through his hands.

Another shed was devoted to rifles, automatic pistols, revolvers, and bayonets. Here the weapons found on the field of battle, or it may be between the opposing lines, were mended and prepared for further use. It was a favourite amusement in the trenches for a soldier to creep out and recover from somewhere in the barbed wire entanglement a comrade's rifle, or perhaps, if occasion were very kind, to carry off a German rifle from an enemy listening post. There was a small reward offered for all weapons brought in from between the lines. These weapons were collected and sent to the repair depôt, where, as a beginning, they received a thorough washing and polishing. A gang of expert

gunsmiths took charge of all repairs that could be done at the front, with the result that there were racks of rifles and revolvers lining the shed, filled with weapons that were spotless and looked as if they had just come out of the factory. If this were the only department in the repair dépôt, it would certainly be doing a very valuable work.

Before the war drinking water was almost as scarce in the Champagne Pouilleuse as in the desert, and the military engineers had to bore hundreds of wells to supply the troops. Unfortunately water was only struck at a great depth. The matter, however, was taken seriously in hand by the high command, and gangs of professional well-sinkers, drawn from the soldiers mobilised, were formed. The result was that the country was soon covered with *points d'eau* (water provision stations), which, though less romantic, were quite as precious as the oases of the desert.

Endless difficulties had to be faced in the boring of the wells. At certain seasons those that had not been sunk deep enough ran dry, and all that could be drawn from them was a curiously obnoxious species of mud. These wells were at once doubled, one shaft being used as far as possible, while a second shaft was driven down to a point at which fresh water would certainly be found.

At the time of my visit the organisation was complete. At fixed points along the Decauville railways cisterns were erected, and into them water was pumped by machine power. Pipes were run on wooden supports in such a way that the tanks could be filled with the least expense of time and labour. Drinking troughs were provided for the horses, which in the past had been

watered with the greatest difficulty. In some cases, where there was reason to suspect the purity of the water—particularly in places where there had been heavy fighting—a general system of water distribution was arranged. Pipes were laid down from springs at a considerable distance, and a whole tract of desert country, inhabited for the moment by large bodies of troops, was provided with a permanent water supply such as many towns would be glad to possess.

In the Champagne Pouilleuse there was a scarcity of wood, as of everything else except mud. Before the war there were a certain number of small pine woods, but the pine-trees never grew big and did little more than exist in the inhospitable soil. Since the war began these woods had been cut to pieces, in the front lines by French and German shells and in the rear by the axes of the engineers. Such woods as were left were urgently needed for cover, since experience had shown that in modern warfare woods possess a far greater military value than had ever been supposed. For the organisation behind the lines endless supplies of wood were needed. All the later installations, for instance, were built of wood. The soldiers' cantonments and the ambulances required thousands of square feet of planking, and tons of hewn logs were needed for the corduroy roads. This wood had to be brought up from the rear. A good deal was provided by the Forest of the Mountain of Rheims, and as a general rule it was sawn up into the planks required by the sawmills that were temporarily established in the rear of the fighting zone. No little time and thought was given by the first bureau of the Army of Champagne to the establishment of these sawmills at

points where they would be most useful and best provided with means of communication.

The principle on which the entire French organisation was based was that of assuring a minimum of waste. This principle was particularly well illustrated by the system of meat supply. As a general rule it may be said that the army was provided with fresh meat, and frozen meat was used only to make up for a shortage which, in the circumstances, was inevitable. On the day when I visited one of the most important meat depôts behind the Champagne lines 30,000 fresh meat rations had just been served out, and a deficit of 10,000 rations had been made up by the frozen meat brought from abroad. The system was as elastic as possible, thanks to the Paris motor omnibuses, which were used to convey to each depôt just that amount of frozen meat that would make up the deficit of fresh meat. Everything was done to prevent unnecessary carrying to and fro, as motor buses were a severe strain on the roads.

The military slaughterhouses, to which the cattle were driven, were extremely clean and well equipped, and the commissariat officers took the greatest pride in the fact that no part of the beasts killed was wasted. One of them remarked rather sadly that this general statement was not absolutely correct, although they hoped it would soon be so. They possessed an apparatus for heating the blood and converting it into manure, but unhappily so far they had not been able to find a buyer. However, they hoped that the farmers of the interior would soon take off their hands the only by-product of which they had been unable to dispose.

The French soldier is particularly fond of tripe,

which makes a welcome change in his rations, and the army butchers were able to provide him with appetising dishes of that succulent delicacy. The troops were also supplied with home-made sausages, which were "smoked" in savoury fashion over a fire of wood shavings into which pieces of onion peel were thrown to flavour the sausages.

The hides of the slaughtered beasts were salted and despatched, according to their size, to various tanneries in the interior. The horns were also sold, and represented a considerable economy to the State.

The *poilus* were all agreed that their food was both varied and excellent, and that its system of distribution was as perfect as possible. Not the least of its advantages was the care and skill with which every description of waste was obviated. No pains were spared to enable the State to get the fullest value for its money, and continually, ever since the beginning of trench warfare, the general organisation had been improved and developed, until it reached a pitch of perfection hitherto unknown.

Any description of the organisation behind the lines would be utterly incomplete unless a word or two were said as to the brain of the army—the general staff, which directs, organises, and controls the complicated machine.

One can recognise the headquarters of a brigade, a division, or an army, in the towns and villages behind the fighting line, by the motley collection of motor-cars which are invariably drawn up in front of it.

As for the house itself, its appearance throws no light on the part that it is playing in the war, for headquarters are always posted in the most convenient

spot, whether it be some huge historic *château* or a humble private house. In the great *château* all the services of the staff can be accommodated without need of temporary buildings.

If the general staff is lucky enough to have a large house at its disposal, its first care is to introduce the telephone and the electric light. There are still many houses in France which do not possess these modern conveniences. Comfort ceases to be an essential; everything is arranged to ensure the due working of all the various departments in charge of the army with a minimum of labour and delay.

It may be, however, that there is no large house at a convenient spot. Then the most commodious building available is chosen, and all around it spring up wooden buildings, fitted simply with desks, telephones, and electric lights and a hard chair or two, in which the real business of the army is carried on as methodically and seriously as though the officers there were working in the employ of some great business firm.

If there is any comfort, it is to be found in the General's study, and that comfort is such as would have appealed to the heart of Savonarola. Instead of pictures, the walls are hung with maps and perhaps a collection of aeroplane photographs of the German lines. The maps in themselves are fascinating things, with their many-coloured chalk marks, showing the essential points of the opposing lines. The aeroplane photographs are an amazing patchwork in their first state, but, thanks to the skill of the modern military photographer, the final print has lost all traces of its origin, which is something that closely resembles a Chinese puzzle. Dozens of aviators' photographs, each

of which necessarily overlaps its neighbour, are fitted together with the most painstaking care, until a bird's-eye view of all the hostile trenches has been secured.

There is one corridor in a famous *château* which has had something to add to its centuries of historic reminiscences, for it was here that a French General, as I have narrated in another chapter, directed a series of operations which marked a definite recoil of the German front in France.

Often, however, the most convenient village has no house large enough to accommodate the staff and all its services. Then, perhaps, two houses will be pressed into service. In one the General and his officers will live and take their meals, while in the other they will do their work.

In all headquarters the three bureaux of the staff all have their special offices. The first bureau is in charge of communications, *matériel*, *personnel*, revictualling, and the like; the second is in charge of intelligence, and the third of operations. It is at headquarters that the officers who form the first bureau work out the whole system of light railways required to keep the front lines provided with all that is necessary alike for defence and offence; they are responsible for the provision of munitions and commissariat, and for all clerical work in connection with the *personnel*, including recommendations for honours and promotion. The second bureau collects and puts together every scrap of information that can be obtained as to the enemy's positions and intentions. It is at the moment of actual fighting that the heaviest work falls on the third bureau, when at a moment's notice it may have to transport tens of

thousands of men to a particular place in order to reinforce a threatened point ; it is on this bureau that all the complicated arrangements for such a movement of troops fall.

It is certainly true that far less "shop" is talked only a mile or two behind the firing line than in the rear. At the General's table conversation mainly turns on questions of art, literature, and the like. If an Englishman is there, it is likely that he will be asked questions concerning the British Navy and its work, and their meaning is more fully appreciated by the men who are fighting to save the land of France from the German invader than by those who are sitting in safety behind the iron barrier which they have built.

If questions of war are discussed, they are discussed quietly, and between two or three people. The intelligence expert will take advantage of lunch or dinner to communicate his ideas to, say, the artillery or the transport expert, while the head of the aviation department may well have a word to say to the officer responsible for the engineers. But these really important conversations are conducted in an undertone, while the general conversation goes on. As a rule the French General is a man of wide culture and interest, and is anxious for information concerning every department of human life. The war has shown that many branches of activity which seemed purely pacific can be pressed into military service, and the modern French commander always has his eyes open to some new idea that he can adapt to serve the duties that he has to perform.

"I am a soldier," said a General one night, "because I have always admired the soldiers of the First Republic

and Napoleon." This casual remark illustrates the sense of history which on the one hand makes every French officer so intensely keen on his profession, and on the other hand gives him so deep an interest in every aspect of this world-wide war. In every staff one will find the fighting in Africa or the East discussed with the same interest and enthusiasm as if it were taking place on the Western front. No one can accuse the French officer of failing to realise that in truth there is only one front on which civilisation is fighting against Germany. Naturally many of them have followed closely the Balkan wars as affording the only practical lessons in modern warfare that were available before August, 1914, and everything that happens, whether it be in Salonica, Mesopotamia, or South Africa, they regard from the same point of view—what effect will it have in reducing Germany's power of resistance?

It is, perhaps, in living in close relation with the officers of a general staff that one can best appreciate the magnificent spirit which animates the French army and which enabled it to raise an impregnable barrier across Europe against the advance of the barbarian. From the professional point of view, every officer of the staff works for a number of hours during the day which would appal the Utopian who hopes that some day hours of labour will be limited for the whole world by Act of Parliament. One and all they are enthusiasts in their own particular line of business. Long ago the men who were not prepared to work themselves to the bone, if there were any, have disappeared, and to-day there is not a single officer who does not throw his whole heart into the particular job entrusted to him

quite as enthusiastically as a great artist working at the masterpiece that his own genius has chosen for him.

It has been my good fortune to visit every sector of the French lines, under the guidance of the officers responsible for that portion of the great fortress which defends the heart of France from the invader. Every one of them has shown his work with the true creator's pride, and the only regret I have ever heard expressed is that it has never been put to that practical test for which it was devised—that is, a German offensive.

It is a liberal education to go round the lines with a local staff officer. His main object is to show the visitor all that is interesting in that part of the line for which his army is responsible. But he never loses sight of a more important purpose. Chance has it that he is visiting the trenches or, it may be, the organisation behind the lines, and he takes advantage of that chance to assure himself of endless matters which, even in these days of telephones, cannot be arranged from a distance.

The officer in charge of the sector has, perhaps, shown all that is important in his command, but before saying farewell the staff officer has a word to say. "Have you received," he may ask, "all the wooden gratings you need to pave your trenches?" "Yes," the officer in command may perhaps reply, "I have received all I asked for, but I think I could do with a few more loads." "All right!" is the reply; "I'll see that you have a fresh supply to-morrow."

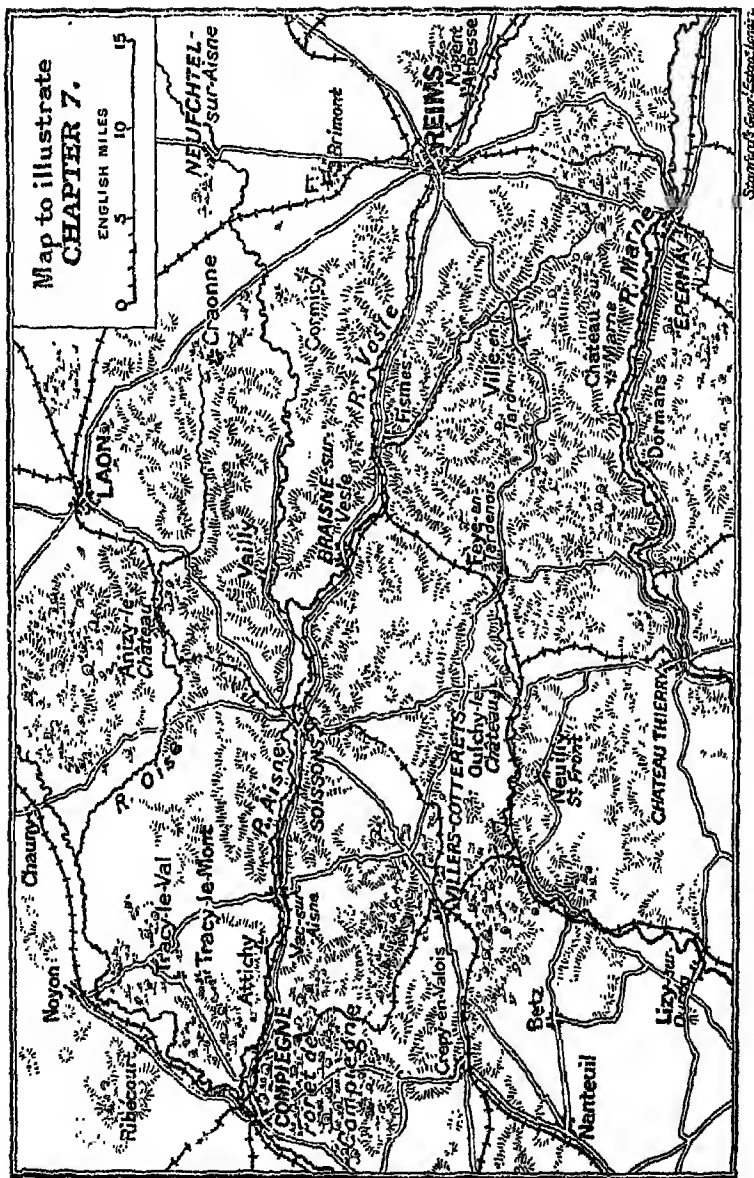
It is impossible for a staff officer to pass through any particular section without inquiring into the

working of the organisation on which everything depends. It may be machine-guns, it may be merely logs or rails, or it may be 75's and ammunition ; no matter what, his ears are always open to the smallest suggestion of something needed by the man on the spot, and many visits to the French front have given me a very definite impression that these casual, unofficial conversations bear very valuable fruit. The French realise fully that the man on the spot has a far better idea of what is needed to meet the practical demands of the minute than the man, no matter how skilled he may be, who is a number of miles away.

Map to illustrate
CHAPTER 7.

ENGLISH MILES

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CHAPTER VII

FROM RHEIMS TO COMPIÈGNE.

OF Rheims and its desecrated cathedral there is little to write which has not been already written. My first glimpse of Rheims was from an observation post in a forest. One could follow for miles the French and German positions, moulded the one upon the other, while a straight line of trees marked the famous Roman road of Rheims. The Germans in Nogent-l'Abbesse were firing vigorously. "The Boches must have been beaten somewhere!" said an officer, "and they are as usual working off their bad temper by bombarding Rheims!" Right away to the left, in the far distance, the great towers of the cathedral rose through the mist, and one could discern the houses of the town which the Germans were so purposelessly bombarding.

My last recollection of Rheims is of a town that had suffered cruelly; yet nowhere on the line had life gone on with less change. Children were playing in the streets, women were going to the fountains to fetch water, shops were open, and everyone was going about his work as though the Germans were still as far away as they were before the war. The quaintest impression of all was a square utterly and completely ruined except for one small wineshop. Before this wineshop were standing four ancient cabs, with four

ancient horses and four ancient cabmen, waiting apparently for fares.

In times of bombardment the whole aspect of the town changed instantly. Everyone retired to the nearest shelters. Then, when the storm had passed, they began their lives again.

The interior of the cathedral had suffered less than might have been expected. It was exposed to a cross-fire from the forts of Brimont and Nogent-l'Abbesse, but it was so turned that, as a rule, the shells did not strike the building itself, but exploded on the flying buttresses outside. Splinters of these shells worked havoc with the glorious glass, but the carving on the pillars inside did not suffer. When a shell exploded, the noise of the explosion was multiplied a hundred times inside the cathedral, and as one hastily took refuge behind a pillar the air seemed full of flying fragments. When the roar died away, there was a tinkling patter of the precious glass falling and breaking on the ancient stones. The mediæval builders built to defy not only time, but modern science, and perhaps the worst damage of all was wrought by the fire that at the time of the first bombardment caught the scaffolding which had been erected for repairs to the façade. One-third of the carving of the façade was badly calcined, and it is to be hoped that any effort at restoring it will be carefully controlled. One eight-inch shell, which landed fair and square on the roof, failed to make any impression at all inside the cathedral. A second shell of the same calibre, which also exploded on the roof, succeeded in making a small hole, through which, in the darkness of the vaulted roof, the light outside twinkled like a star. About half the rose window

remained uninjured, and the carving on the capitals of the pillars was untouched.

Rheims Cathedral had resisted thirty or forty eight-inch shells and over 100 six-inch shells, thanks to the art of its builders and the solidity of its stone. At Soissons the German discovered, to his hideous glee, that the cathedral was built of soft, crumbling stone, on which his shells could produce the maximum effect. Every flying splinter bit deep into the very heart of the blocks which were once so nobly shaped to enshrine the majesty of the builders' faith.

The main road to Soissons runs boldly direct, in true French fashion, across the plain. When I traversed it early in 1916 it was, in literal truth, a broad highway that led to destruction, for before it reached the town of Clovis it was swept by the German guns posted on the hills that form the further bank of the Aisne. To reach Soissons safely one had to pass by strait and devious paths, which zigzagged wildly in every direction except that of the town itself. The screened road built by the French engineers plunged through every obstacle. Gaps had been opened in walls and fences, big trees had been cut down and private gardens laid waste to allow it to pass. The approach to Soissons, with its acute angle corners, its sudden turns, and its arbitrary meanderings, dependent solely on the question of cover, reminded one of the puzzles in which a steady hand has to manœuvre a marble along a roundabout course, beset with many traps and holes, to a central resting-place.

Things best worth doing are seldom easy, and the places best worth visiting are generally difficult of

access. Soissons was no exception to the rule. It had a physiognomy of its own, quite distinct from that of other towns that lay in the forefront of the French lines, exposed incessantly by night and day to the shells of the German artillery. Arras, with its 26,000 inhabitants, was twice the size of Soissons, and the importance of its streets and the number of its houses, of which not one had escaped unscathed, accentuated the impressive melancholy of its desolation. The last remaining Arrageois went about their necessary daily tasks, buying and selling and working at their trades, under an almost continuous bombardment, with the fine stoicism and the grim determination of men and women who were accustomed to look death in the face unafraid. When the shells began to explode, they went down into their cellars and shelters and waited till the enemy's lust for destruction was sated. In Soissons this same stoicism and determination had something almost light-hearted about it.

There was an inn there, at the very end of civilisation, where a man could find good food to eat and good wine to drink. In that inn there was a billiard table, and those of the worthies of the town who still remained played placidly, just as they had done for years beyond counting, as though German shells were figments of the brain. There were still a number of shops open, plying their trade as usual. In the window of a barber's shop a wax lady, with immaculately waved golden hair, gazed with a fixed and meaningless smile at the blackened ruins of a little house. In a shop which dealt in cameras and the like we found two girls of about fifteen and sixteen, with their hair in pigtails, who assured us that they had learnt to take

bombardments as a matter of course. "When the shells begin to fall," said one of them, "we just stay indoors till it is all over. Once or twice, when they were falling very near, we went down to the cellar, but it was too uncomfortable. There is a public bomb-proof shelter just near, but it is really not worth going there. We take our chance, like everyone else. Lately things have been pretty quiet during the day, and it is mostly at night that the Germans bombard us. Not that it is any the more pleasant for that! At first the noise used to keep us awake, but now we have grown accustomed to it, and we sleep through it all."

English people, near whose homes a Zeppelin has dropped its purposeless bombs, can form some idea of the courage of these women and children, who go cheerfully about their lives under a perpetual menace. The Zeppelin comes and goes, and is the slave of the weather; its cargo of destruction is limited, and it must brave the dangers of the sea before it can reach our island. The women of Soissons knew that the German guns on the hills that commanded the town at so short a distance could open fire whenever their gunners pleased, and that their shells would continue to fall in the streets and on the houses until the enemy grew tired of murder and destruction. There was just one check on German licence in this matter, and that was the fear of reprisals. The enemy knew full well that for every projectile he sent to destroy private property and murder civilians he would receive several French shells fired at his most vulnerable points, where a real military object could be achieved.

As we walked along the streets of Soissons we could see abundant evidence of how courage and habit could prevail over every danger. Here it was a man offering for sale the Paris newspapers of the same morning ; there it was two men gesticulating vigorously and driving a hard bargain in the matter of certain barrels of wine. Sometimes from a house there would come a burst of voices engaged in argument, and, to judge from the tone, their owners were as serious and as obstinate in their discussion as though the Germans had never crossed the border.

Yet if the people of Soissons were brave and kept up their hearts nobly, their peaceful little town was sad and desolate. There was a fine broad avenue between two rows of trees where no human being set his foot. Grass was growing between the cobbles, and loneliness and desertion hung heavily about it. Once it was a thoroughfare where people went busily to and fro and market carts passed noisily, but now it was as mysteriously silent and unkempt as the untended garden of a haunted house. This avenue was in full view of the enemy, and wherever German eyes pierced there was death in the air. So it was that the citizens of Soissons had to pass by devious side streets, and the avenue which was once their pride was given up to a dog or two and a few hens, which must have been amazed at the strange liberty they enjoyed.

The hens were picking and scratching contentedly in the avenue, but the jackdaws of the cathedral were full of worry and agitation. The nests that had been theirs from time immemorial had been shattered and destroyed by a storm beyond their comprehension, a storm that

had ground to powder the solid masonry that must have seemed to them as enduring as the earth. They flapped about crying mournfully among the bare rafters of the roof, looking down into a desecrated nave of which they could never have suspected the existence and holding noisy councils as though to decide whether the time had not come to desert the cathedral that had been their home.

Of all the sad sights in Soissons none was sadder than the cathedral. For its destruction the barbarian could put forward no excuse. Its tower could never be used for observation purposes, since the French held hills on the banks of the Aisne which afforded an infinitely better view of the German lines. It was destroyed deliberately and devilishly, for destruction's sake. The cathedral of Soissons, with its perfectly proportioned interior, was a thing of beauty, and the German needed no other reason for destroying it.

Long before my visit two arches in the west end, just in front of the organ, had collapsed, opening a great breach in the roof. But even though several other columns had been damaged and the whole edifice seriously endangered, the German was not content with this partial mutilation. One day there appeared in the German *communiqué* a vague, ill-concocted lie, accusing the French of misusing the Red Cross flag at Soissons. The object of the lie was clear: the Germans were providing themselves with an excuse in advance for finishing off the mutilated cathedral. Shells once again began to hail on the devoted building.

Less than a week before I was there four more arches

collapsed, with the roof, and more than half the beautiful building was beyond all hope of repair. There was a great breach in the walls through which one could see isolated buttresses and lumps of masonry, balanced fantastically against the sky. Overhead the bare skeleton of the rafters and the laths of the roof were outlined black against the sky, like the pathetic ribs of a boat left to rot ashore. There was scarcely a pane of glass intact in the painted windows, and the air was melancholy with the faint clinking of morsels of glass one against another, still held in their leaden frames, with the crying of the jackdaws, and the occasional crash of a stone falling headlong from the walls on to the débris below.

Yet with it all the cathedral seemed to hold itself bravely, hiding the wounds that it had suffered nobly in the great battle of right against wrong ; and even though it was stricken to death, it awaited with the unflinching confidence of its builders' faith the ultimate end of things—the inevitable victory of the cause for which it stood.

West of Soissons, where the opposing lines turned northward between Aisne and Oise, above the ruined villages of Tracy-le-Val and Tracy-le-Mont, the ground rose high above the rivers in a series of steep wooded hills—no easy fighting country. It was just north of Compiègne that the German lines were nearest to Paris. The Germans were at Noyon, little more than fifty miles, in a bee-line, from the Ville Lumière, while the French held Ribécourt against them. Between French and German trenches, in the marshes of the Oise, lay No Man's Land.

No Man's Land was all day long a bullet-swept desert, where no living thing could show itself and live; but as soon as darkness fell it became alive with grey mysterious forms, gliding to and fro in ghostlike silence. After hours of walking in the trenches—where, perhaps a mile or more behind the lines, all traffic must pass below the surface, for fear of the enemy's shells—it was a strange and memorable experience to find oneself in the open, in the No Man's Land between the trenches, with nothing but a narrow barbed wire entanglement and a screen of darkness between oneself and the Boches, only 200 yards away.

At the particular point of the front which I visited in this district the opposing trenches were often from 800 to 1,000 yards apart. The ground was very marshy, and it was impossible to push forward the lines, since any attempt at trench-making was impracticable. The approach to this debatable ground was impressive enough.

First we passed through a ruined village, where not a light or sign of life was to be seen. Barbed wires and walls of great stones roughly piled together, trenches, and barricades, had turned this village into a fortress. Never had town been laid out and planned with more care and thought, though chaos itself would seem order compared with that unhappy village. Every section of it was a centre of resistance, carefully devised to give a maximum of cover and capable of carrying on a defence even when all the other sections on either side had been captured.

Yet it seemed that an invisible army must be protecting this point in the Great Wall of Civilisation;

none of its defenders were to be seen. Even the sentries were completely hidden from view, so much so that, while on our way, we had an amusing hunt for one of them, as the officer who accompanied us was anxious to prove that, despite appearances, unsleeping watch and ward was being kept.

We blundered along in the darkness beside a garden wall, but not a living soul was to be found. At last we came to a doorway, and there in an armoured greenhouse—from which, it need scarcely be said, all the glass had disappeared—we found our sentry, placidly gazing out across the marsh.

In the heart of the first line there was a trench which led out in audacious fashion into the marshes, straight towards the German lines. We walked on wooden gratings set high above the muddy water at the bottom of the trenches, and everything was silent with a sinister silence. A grey mist which had risen with the end of the short winter day seemed to muffle every sound.

We followed this trench to an isolated block of buildings, once a factory, some 200 yards in advance of the French front trenches. These buildings had been mercilessly shelled and looked as desolate and uninhabited as the ruins of Pompeii, but our guide groped his way to a door, which was thrown open at his knock. The dim light of a smoky lamp showed a small and cosy shelter, dug deep in the ground and protected with sandbags and piles of débris. There were half a dozen men inside it—cheerful French cavalrymen, who were amusing themselves with a game of cards.

At his officer's order the commander of the section,

a gay, venturesome youth of just over twenty, came out to guide us to the *poste d'écoute*, the advanced post, where all night long the sentries strained their ears to catch a sound of the enemy's movements. As soon as the first gleams of dawn appeared they returned hastily to the cover of the trenches, for delay meant certain death.

The trench we had followed still continued. It passed in complete blackness through the very centre of the factory, and as we passed we had a dim impression of monstrous machines, half wrecked by the enemy's shells, that loomed weird and menacing on either hand. Then, as we neared the marshes, the trench grew shallower and shallower, and eventually came to an end. We stepped out into the open, and our guide warned us to move warily and not to talk above a whisper.

We set out towards the German lines with a hedge, dimly visible, on our right to guide us. Caution was necessary, since we had to find the gaps in the barbed wire—gaps that could be filled at a moment's notice with *chevaux de frise* and movable barbed wire obstacles lying ready to hand. In Indian file the four of us went forward until we reached our *poste d'écoute*, to which a pile of railway sleepers offered a semblance of cover, and that was all, for anything more solid would certainly have attracted a German shell. There was no one there, however, as two days before the sentries had been moved forward some 200 yards.

As we went on we were startled by a low whistle on our left, which was repeated three times. Someone in the darkness was on the watch, awake to the slightest

sound. Our guide replied cautiously. "It is the *maréchal des logis*!" he said. The *maréchal des logis* had been out on a little scouting expedition, seeing that the barbed wire defences were all intact, and the sudden appearance of four shadows moving furtively along the hedge had filled him with suspicion, and it was with fixed bayonet ready for immediate use that he came towards us. Reassured, he took the lead, and after another 200 yards along the hedge we reached the most advanced post.

We were more than half-way across No Man's Land. Further progress could only be made by crawling forward in the mud, with the imminent risk of finding ourselves face to face with an armed Boche in a similar attitude.

We came upon this listening post suddenly. It consisted simply of three men sitting in a hedge. They were sitting there as motionless as statues and as silent, their muddied pale-blue uniforms almost invisible, while their half-seen trench helmets gave them a strange mediæval air. With their rifles, bayonets fixed, held between their knees, they were ready to charge or challenge at the smallest noise. Their only protection was a few lines of barbed wire, which they had put up two nights before.

They rose and saluted on our arrival. They were very pleased at the unwonted appearance of visitors from the rear. The only visitors they received in their lonely vigil, as a rule, were less agreeable, for the intruders came from the side to which their attention was always turned, and such visits usually ended with the crack of a rifle or the stab of a bayonet.

The *maréchal des logis* went to inspect his barbed

wire and apparently found something to interest him very much, for he went down on all fours and began to crawl forward. On the other side of the hedge two more sentries were talking together in low, mysterious tones. And then one suddenly realised that the silence of the night was full of little noises. There was a cry of a marsh bird, and one wondered whether it was a German signal. We felt that the darkness was full of hostile forms, creeping with the stealth of Red Indians upon us. A rustle in the hedge—a bird, probably, or a mouse—made one start and strain one's eyes into the darkness.

The *maréchal des logis* rose to his feet with an expression of annoyance. "They have cut the wire!" he whispered; "they have cut clean through all six lines on the side nearest the hedge!" "Who has cut it?" I asked. "Why, the Boches, of course!" he answered impatiently. "One of them must have crept up last night without the sentry hearing him. It is a trick we are always playing on one another. You see, their advanced post is only 200 yards away, and it is quite easy to worm one's way through the long marsh grass without giving any warning that one is there!"

One of the sentries joined in the conversation. "I have just found a German rifle," he said, "leaning up against the barbed wire fifteen yards away from where I was on guard last night. We fired two or three shots, and I think we must have wounded our man, as he left his gun behind!" "They are daring enough," said the *maréchal des logis*. "It was only a few days back one of them stuck a white flag on our barbed wire. However, we got even with him next day by steal-

ing a rifle that they left in a hedge well behind their advanced post! "

In this debatable country war is full of surprises and stratagems, and from the French cavalryman's point of view it was ideal. Though he was deprived of his horse and sabre, he had the joy of fighting in the open and of pitting his wits, man to man, against the enemy's. One of these men told me afterwards how one night, when an alarm had been given, he crawled forward to see what was happening and found nothing but a German officer mortally wounded. The curious thing was that, though the officer still had in his pockets his military papers, nothing of any value was left upon him. Watch and money had all disappeared. "To my mind," said the *chasseur*, "he had gone out with a couple of men to scout, and when he was wounded they robbed their own officer and left him to die! "

Naturally enough, in No Man's Land a spice of danger was not lacking, and the Germans laid many traps to catch the unwary. A favourite scheme was to stick up a flag, with a bundle of newspapers attached, somewhere between the lines where the French would see it from their trenches. The men were strictly forbidden to risk their lives by paying any attention to such traps, but often the temptation was too great. One day two men who had been punished for some trifling offence, and who were anxious to rehabilitate themselves, tried to bring in one of these flags on their own account. As soon as they tried to pull it out of the ground a mine exploded beneath their feet.

The men at the listening post were extremely angry

at the success of the Germans who had cut their wire, and I heard them whispering together, plotting their revenge. The officer who was with us sternly ordered them to do nothing foolhardy, and they promised to be good, but in No Man's Land the soldier could do very much as he liked, and I should not be surprised if that night, after we left them, some trick was played on the Boches, who presumably were straining their ears to hear what we were doing 200 yards away.

We stopped for a few minutes by the barbed wire and tried to see Germans crawling up to the barrier, but nothing moved. The men had stopped talking and disappeared, every man gliding away to his post, with his rifle and bayonet at the ready. It was hard to realise that in daylight we could not have stood there a moment, for the whole of those marshy fields were swept not only by rifle fire, but by machine-guns.

After saying good-night to the *chasseurs*, we tramped back to the cover of the trenches. There was something curiously secure and homelike in trudging along between two walls of earth after the naked openness of No Man's Land.

At one point along the lines in this sector there were large quarries, and there was an abundance of grey stone that was very easy to work. Here during the first summer of the war they built walls of large slabs of this stone along several miles of trenches, thinking that at last they had found a way to prevent the continual crumbling of the parapets. Events, however, disappointed the builders' expectations. The rain permeated the earth, so that its weight pushed

the two walls together and almost closed the trench. The men consequently had to begin their work all over again, and when I was there they were pulling down the walls they had built and reconstructing them with outward slopes, to counteract the thrust of the soil. Such work might seem dispiriting, but the men who were engaged upon it were as gay as ever. They were particularly pleased at one thing. Their trenches were bad ; they admitted it. Down in the front line, where the German mines and trench-sweepers had been at work, one had almost to crawl through a foot of mud, as otherwise one's head would have been above the parapet. But the German trenches were infinitely worse. The French soldiers in the first line had incontrovertible proof of this, for all the morning long they had seen little parties of Boches, four or five at a time, scrambling up on to their parapets and bolting across the open ground as hard as they could to their trenches in the rear. Their appearance broke the monotony of existence in the trenches, and they were shot down mercilessly as they ran. They would certainly never have exposed themselves to such risks if their trenches had not been entirely blocked by "landslides."

The General commanding the division stationed at this point was kind enough to guide me to some of the most interesting places in the trenches over which he reigned supreme. As we went down towards the enemy he had a word or two for every man we passed, and he seemed to know personally every man, from the non-commissioned officer in charge of a section to the rawest recruit who had just come up from Brittany or Savoy. It was relief day, and there had been no

time to organise fatigue parties to clean out the trenches; consequently we saw things at their worst. But neither mud nor rain could damp the gaiety of the men, who were squatting in their shelters, eating their morning meal.

"Is the soup good?" asked the General as he passed. The men had risen and saluted, and some self-appointed spokesman replied, "*Oui, mon général!*" "That's all right!" said the General. "Then I suppose I shall not find you kicking the cook again to-day!" A burst of laughter greeted this reference to an incident which had for a few brief moments broken the fraternity of the trenches.

We met a man, a Breton, who was muffled up with coats and a heavy sheepskin, until he looked more like a bundle of clothes than a man. It was a very warm day, although it was raining. "What on earth are you wearing all those clothes for?" said the General. "What will you do when it is really cold?" The man looked rather confused and replied: "Well, *mon général*, as they served out all these nice warm things, I thought it was a pity not to wear them; and you will see that I shall bear the cold as well as anyone else!" "That is always the way with these Bretons!" said the General, laughing. "They always fancy it is cold and put on every bit of covering they can find, though I must say that last year there were some of them who refused the sheepskins that were served out, 'because,' they said, 'they were not smart!'"

The sheepskin was certainly not smart. It still preserved the shape of the animal. There was a hole for the head, and it was tied round the waist

with a piece of string, the fleece, of course, being worn inside.

"This year," the General added, "they are not worrying about smartness. There is not a man who did not ask anxiously for his sheepskin!"

After looking at the Boche trenches from an observation post 200 or 300 yards distant, we gradually worked our way down to the advanced lines. There I was shown some ingenious new appliances for annoying the enemy. The quick wits of the Frenchman had been set to work, and his originality had devised any number of machines and curious stratagems that must have made the lives of the Germans, 100 yards away, a perfect burden to them.

Eventually we reached a spot where the word went round that there must be no talking. How near we were to the Germans was shown by the wire netting above our heads that was intended to catch the enemy's hand grenades, and on the parapet sentries were watching intently for any movement in the German lines.

"Now," said the General, "we will stir up the Germans a little! It is lunch-time, and they will be excessively annoyed!"

We went to a shelter which protected a new and simple appliance for throwing high explosives *noiselessly* into the enemy's lines. It was this noiselessness which made it particularly objectionable, because no amount of observation on the part of the Germans could show them its position. A shell filled with a very considerable quantity of *mélinite* left the shelter noiselessly. Then a second or two later, when it had reached its mark, there

came a big explosion. It was followed by a second shell.

"That will do!" said the General. "We have stirred them up now, and they will be exceedingly puzzled, for two isolated bombs are extremely uncommon, and they certainly will be unable to understand their purpose. Anyhow, in three minutes we shall get their reply!"

We started back towards the rear, but before we had gone fifty yards there was a tremendous report. A *minenwerfer* was engaged in explaining to the French that the Germans were much annoyed at having their lunch interrupted. Our two bombs called forth four mines from the enemy, which shifted a quantity of earth, but otherwise did no harm. The enemy then apparently returned to his meal, as there was silence.

But at this point the French artillery behind us had something to say. The position of the mine-throwers had been spotted, and it seemed an admirable occasion to shut them up for good. The result was what the French call a *rafale*, or perfect blizzard of "75" shells. It only lasted about three minutes. The 75's barked away with their ear-piercing reports like a pack of hounds that had suddenly gone mad. Then, as abruptly as it began, the noise stopped. "By this time," remarked the General, "all the Germans are underground, so it's no use wasting ammunition!"

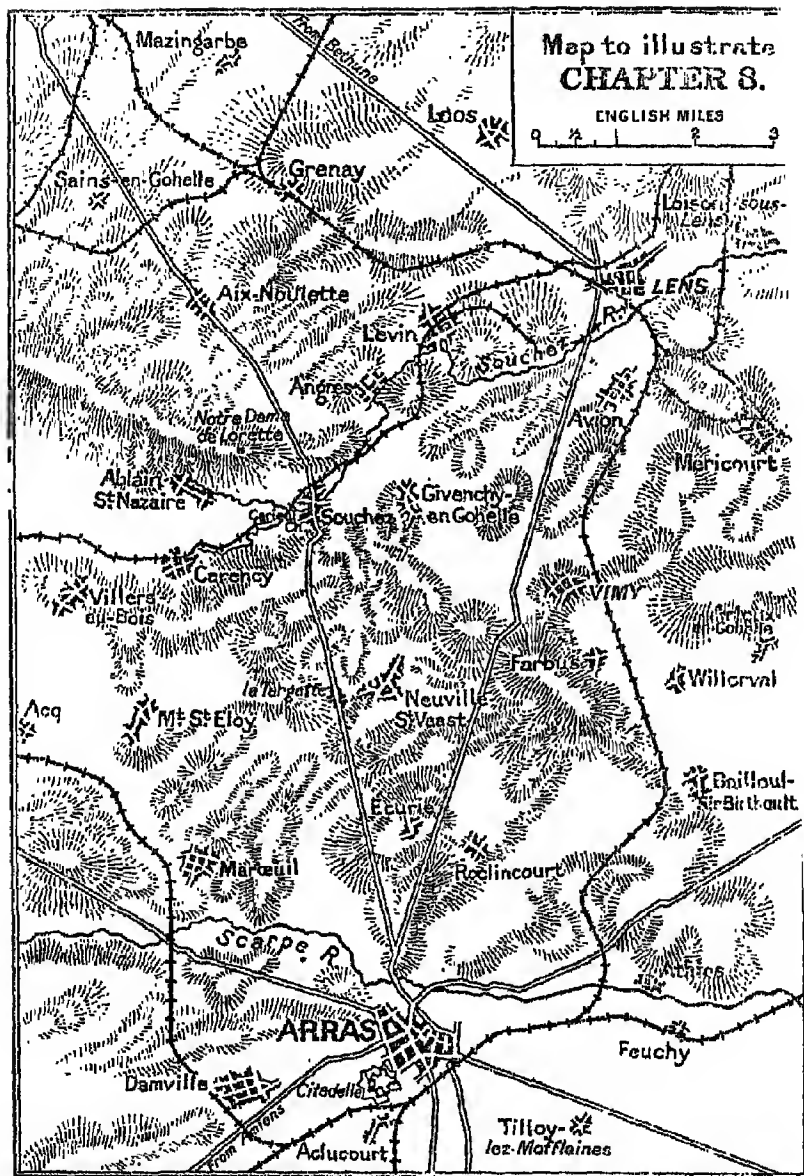
The troops in this part of the world were particularly favoured, as in many cases they had enormous quarries to shelter in. These quarries, cut in the solid rock, extended for hundreds of square yards beneath the surface and were proof against the biggest projectiles

that human wit ever devised. Nothing could be more picturesque than one of these quarries when it was full of men who had just returned from the trenches to take a little hard-earned rest.

Tiny flickering lamps, which gave scarcely more light than a glow-worm, marked the outline of its walls and columns. As a rule these lamps were no more than a wick floating in oil, but here and there the soldiers gathered together round a real candle or lamp, which made things light enough for them to play cards. One caught glimpses of them at the end of a long passage—bearded men, smoking hard, with their faces bent intently upon their game. The play of light and shadow on their stained uniforms and their unstudied attitudes made veritable Rembrandt pictures. In the days of the persecutions the Catacombs must have looked like these French quarries, and to make the illusion complete one came across a chapel, with an altar and its cross hewn in the solid rock.

The men in these quarries had a great advantage over the troops who were quartered in earth shelters: they had no rats, and rats were the plague of the soldier's life in the trenches. They swarmed everywhere and had multiplied immensely from the beginning of the war. "I am going to send you a valuable reinforcement," said a staff major to a colonel at a farm where we rested—"four terriers to catch your rats!" "I shall be very thankful to have them," said the colonel, "but they will not be nearly enough. What I want is rat poison, and lots of it! The rats have actually taken to attacking my men! They are enormous great beasts, and I suppose they are starving. When they are chased down the trenches they often

turn and bite the men in the legs. I can't help wondering if after the war these rats will not become something more than a nuisance, and whether very vigorous measures will not be necessary to get rid of them ! ”



CHAPTER VIII

ARTOIS

AMIENS is to-day almost an English town, like Rouen and Le Havre. It was in its transition stage when I passed there just after the offensive of September, 1915, on my way to the French lines in Artois. The war has brought great prosperity to Amiens, and there was every sign that the coming of the British would not reduce that prosperity.

It was in this district that I came across an English division "taking over" from a French division. It has always been a general principle of war that when any line is held by allied troops the weakest point is to be found at the junction of their respective armies. It is not merely that one organisation begins and another ends, and that there is likely to be debatable ground between them, but also a certain amount of friction is regarded, especially by the Germans, as inevitable between the troops of the different countries. It is assumed that the language difficulty and the difference of habits are bound to make common operations precarious.

Since the beginning of the present war everyone has admired the way in which the French and the English armies have been able to work together. There have been understanding between the staffs and *camaraderie* and good feeling between the men. The result is that when England had developed her strength and was

enabled to put fresh troops into the field on the Continent the Englishmen marched quietly to the posts still held by Frenchmen and replaced their friends and allies with the ease of clockwork. The descendants of the men who fought against Napoleon took up their places along the great wall that had been built across France to keep back the invader as simply and as naturally as though that fortress had been built across Great Britain. The Frenchmen thus replaced, after explaining the various details of their position, set off to another point on the long line, where, in their turn, they were able to relieve troops weary with many weeks of fighting or, it may be, to give at some important point or another a numerical preponderance over the enemy.

It was a miserable, rainy day when I saw the khaki uniforms marching forward and the blue uniforms, almost khaki-coloured with mud, marching back. To begin with, we were in the English zone. Uniform and workmanlike khaki was the predominant colour. Motor-cars, transport carts, and all the other vehicles necessary to an army on the march were turned out from identical models, obviously made for that especial purpose. The military policemen who directed the traffic had clearly chosen the London policeman for their model. Some of them, no doubt, had been London policemen, and they barred the road to speeding motor-cars in the plains of France as phlegmatically as if they were still holding up their hands in the Strand or Piccadilly.

In the villages the arrival of English soldiers was causing great excitement. The men billeted there were striving desperately to make the peasants under-

stand their requirements and, as usual, were a little impatient, not to say indignant, at the slowness of the peasants in understanding words which Tommy Atkins considered must be French, since he shouted them at the top of his voice. However, a common understanding was arrived at in a miraculously short time, and in his usual kind way the British soldier set to work to make himself useful to the people on whom he was billeted. Two Tommies, perched on a long ladder, were performing miracles with the tiles of a house the roof of which had evidently suffered in a recent storm, while an old woman, the owner of the house, stood below and shrieked up at them, in the most voluble tones, advice and eulogy. Other men were sharing their rations with the village children, who came away in high glee with their mouths full of chocolate. Groups of peasants gathered at the corners of the roads and talked with satisfaction of the business that the coming of the English would bring them, knowing that they would have, at any rate for a short time, prosperity such as their little commune had never known.

After a time the ascending stream of khaki, with its uniform, equipment, and convoys, met a descending stream of light blue, faded and battered, with convoys which to English eyes seemed strangely mixed and picturesque. In the French uniforms there was no uniformity. Bearded faces, muffled up in comforters, peered from beneath mud-stained trench helmets, and legs thickly caked in mud swung by in step. To the casual observer all distinctions of arm and regiment had disappeared.

When the lines first met there seemed to be a certain

feeling of shyness between the French and the English. Each man was anxious to show the other how well and soldierly he could bear himself. There was a little ripple in the lines as they passed, and the swing of the marching men grew freer and smarter. Then, after a time, the shyness broke down, and whenever the men were standing easy there was an exchange of nods and smiles, and perhaps, if an interpreter was handy, greetings would be passed. Sometimes an English battalion, lined up along a road, would watch with critical and approving eye a battalion of French *chasseurs* swing past at the quick step, which is their special pride. The French were veterans after months of warfare, and they held themselves as soldiers who had shown themselves the equals of their ancestors who had carried the tricolour of France across all Europe. Yet they, too, looked approvingly at the clean, smiling faces of the English recruits and their workmanlike equipment. Once, in a field near the road, a battery of horse artillery swept up at full gallop. Its guns took up their positions in perfect alignment, while battery after battery of French 75's went jangling past through the mud.

Far away up in the trenches Frenchmen guided the new arrivals through that labyrinth which it takes days of experience to learn. The meaning of signposts was explained, and the position of "dug-outs" and machine-guns, and much had to be said concerning the habits of the enemy in that particular section. The German is a creature of habit, and likes to bombard at a fixed hour. It is well, therefore, to avoid certain spots at certain times.

For a day or so a detachment of French troops

remained behind, until the English had discovered all the strong and the weak points of the position and knew their way about the place thoroughly. Then they and the captain in charge of them set off towards the rear. I met him on his return to civilisation, just before he set off to another part of the front, where great events were expected. "I am glad to get out of it!" he said; "I don't like that particular coloured mud! I sincerely hope your compatriots will succeed in making my 'dug-out' into something more comfortable than it was when I was there!"

We passed the English zone and pressed forward northwards to Arras. There was a bend in the road, just before it reached the town, which was known by the suggestive name of "Le Tournant de la Mort." Here the road was fully open to German observation and to the fire of the German guns, which made their regular toll of victims. As one passed one realised that Arras, an open town, had become a fortress, an advanced post in the very forefront of the firing line. It was an integral part of the great breakwater that civilisation had built up across Europe to keep back that flood of barbarism which threatened to overwhelm the world. The enemy was on the outskirts of the town, where there was the close quarters fighting of the trenches, and the citizen of Arras had learned to scorn, not only the shells that crashed into his house from miles away, but also the deadly bullet that gave no warning of its approach.

Life in Arras was not unlike what it was in the seventeenth century, when it was a beleaguered city. Provisions were more plentiful, and there was communication with the outside world, but the peril of the

bombardment was a hundred times greater. Then they hid their cattle and themselves in enormous cellars, stretching from house to house beneath the streets, which they called *bouvi*, and now those same cellars gave them shelter against the German shells.

Of its 25,000 inhabitants some 600, perhaps 800, remained in Arras, and there was not a single house that had not received its shell. It was to be doubted whether many of these Arrageois would leave their town of their own free will as long as there were a roof left to cover them and a cellar intact to give them refuge when the German shells began to fall. I talked to many of them, and they all gave the same impression of a certain superhuman peace of mind, a strange tranquillity that comes only to those who have weighed the chances and faced the worst undismayed. In their eyes was that far-away look, clear as a distant landscape on a bright summer evening, which before the war was so rare and was the special birthright of the sailor, though now it is to be seen in the eyes of thousands of men in the trenches—the straight, frank glance of men whose duty it is to risk their lives daily and who have no fear of death.

We passed an old man with a heavy burden on his back just as three big shells fell in quick succession some few hundred yards behind us. "They are firing on the cathedral," said the officer who was guiding us, and he turned to the old man and asked: "That was near the cathedral, wasn't it?" "Perhaps!" said the Arrageois, in an even tone. "I am not quite sure, but I shall know soon, as I live there, and I am going home." With a polite "*Bonjour!*" he went quietly on into the danger zone—for where the Boche fires once



ROOM IN WHICH THE WRITER LUNCHEDED AT ARRAS, AS IT WAS
TWO DAYS LATER.

he generally fires many times—to see if his house was still standing.

There were still one or two shops open in Arras ; one of them was kept by a mother and daughter who had never left the town through the unending bombardment that had lasted more than a year. The daughter, a pretty girl of twenty, told us with pride that they had been very lucky. They had only had two shells into the house, which had reduced the back rooms to matchwood, but the front rooms were in excellent condition. " Why," she added, " we actually had the glass in our shop windows until three days ago, when the Germans started bombarding the house on the other side of the road with incendiary shells. Then, of course, all our glass went."

There was one house we visited, in an exposed position, that had been particularly favoured by the enemy. How many shells it had received it was impossible to say, but the outer wall of its upper four storeys had entirely disappeared, and its owner had an incomparable collection of shell cases and splinters. By a miracle the ground floor was still intact, and in the basement we came upon a perfectly tranquil and happy family : an aviary of canaries ; a dog ; a young wife with her baby and her mother. The only thing that seemed to trouble the young woman was the imprudent fashion in which her husband would insist on unscrewing the fuse of every German shell that fell in the house.

Cellars necessarily played a very important part in the life of the Arrageois, and it was fortunate that they were plentiful and had several entrances, one of which was usually upon the road. When a German shell

arrived in any street there was a general movement, everyone making for the nearest cellar. A bursting shell, however, attracted so little attention, and the contempt for danger was so universal, that when a shell fell in any district a whistle was blown to warn everyone near to take cover immediately. There was no undignified hurry; everyone walked quietly to the nearest cellar door—in Arras all these doors were kept open—and stood on the steps until the approaching whirr of a shell assured him or her that it was not a false alarm.

The day we spent in Arras was extremely calm; that is to say that French and Germans combined were firing not more than fifty or sixty shells an hour. These shells were usually of large calibre, so that there was a very considerable amount of noise. In the beautiful arcades of the Grande Place, which had suffered far less than might have been feared, I saw an old market woman sitting with her dog in the sun, and both fast asleep. The noise of the guns was incessant, and yet she was so fast asleep that I was able to photograph her without her knowing it. A big shell came hurtling into the neighbourhood, but she did not move, though a minute later her slumbers were disturbed by the whistle. She moved slowly, calling the dog, to a cellar a yard or two away, waited a little by the door, and then, as nothing happened, went back to her seat and quietly went to sleep again.

It is impossible to praise too highly the calm courage of the Arrageois who had remained in their homes throughout a year's bombardment, and it is only natural that in the beginning they were rather hard on their weaker brethren. In a small square, which seemed to have been the target of German shells of



SLEEPING AMID THE GUNS.

every calibre, there was an iron gate on which was scrawled in chalk the word "*Froussarde*" (*anglicè*, "funk"). Presumably, when the word was written, there was a house behind the gate, and the person who wrote it had been annoyed at its owner leaving Arras. Since then there had been a change. One day a 420 shell had caught the house fair and square, and now there was no house at all, though the gate remained.

We lunched at a place that had until a few days before held the proud position of being the only house left intact in the town. It was no longer unique; a week or so before our visit a large calibre shell had come in through the wall and exploded in the dining-room. Our hosts—officers who had watched Arras being knocked to pieces from the very beginning—took a personal pride in the vagaries of that shell. It had done practically no damage to half the house, which was a very comfortable one. They could still use half the dining-room, if they wanted to, though it was very draughty, as there was nothing but a barricade of curtains to separate them from the garden; consequently we lunched in the hall, where there was not a pane of glass broken. There was still a magnificent bathroom quite undamaged, with hot and cold water; and the central heating, after a few pipes had been patched up, was in perfect working order. "It was high time," said one of the officers, "that something hit the house. We have had two shells in the garden, and the house on the other side of the garden wall was wrecked three weeks ago by a 420 shell. Luckily for the two old ladies who owned it, they were at Mass when the shell arrived!"

We were 700 or 800 yards from the Germans, and we had a memorable lunch. Arras was splendidly provisioned, and the soldier cook surpassed himself. The cellar of the house served as a place of refuge in time of heavy bombardment, and it had been provided with a new exit, for fear that some day or other a shell might wreck the rest of the house above it. Nevertheless it had never ceased to serve the important purpose for which it was built, and its owner, when he left the town, placed at the disposal of our hosts the 2,000 bottles it contained. He was a judge of wine and a rich man. When he was driven out of Arras by the menace of the German advance, he buried under a tree in his garden £60,000 in notes and stocks and shares. Later he returned to dig for his treasure. He dug and dug and dug, and still his spade did not strike the leaden chest in which he had hidden his fortune. Perspiration poured down his face; he tore his hair and bewailed his fate, quite regardless of the fact that the Germans had just begun to bombard the town with exceptional violence. Then suddenly he looked up, seized the spade again, and began to dig madly under another tree. A minute or two later his efforts were rewarded, and he brought to the surface the still unopened chest. In the excitement of the moment he had forgotten the tree under which he had buried it.

The psychology of panic is a curious thing. In France, where banks are not trusted and where 1870 is still remembered, the first instinct of the man who is flying from home is to dig a hole and bury his treasure. During the war there have been innumerable instances of the overwhelming power of this instinct. It would seem far easier for people to take their money with

them. An old woman in Loos buried £200 in one of the cellars which the Germans converted into a subterranean fortress. By an extraordinary chance no German pickaxe disturbed her hoard, and soon after the Germans were driven out by the British the money was recovered and sent back to her intact.

The officers who had entertained us so royally guided us through the streets of Arras to see all that was most worth seeing. They took a personal pride in every shell-hole and had a story to tell about half of them. So much has been written about the damage to the famous buildings of Arras that it would be to repeat an oft-told tale to bewail the destruction of the ancient Hôtel de Ville.

One thing above all was impressed upon me by those Arrageois, whose heroism commands attention: that never under any circumstances should the profane hand of the "restorer" be allowed to touch these glorious relics.

The size of Arras made the deserted streets, with their shattered houses and the grass growing between the cobbles, particularly impressive. Everywhere one had the uneasy feeling that one was being watched by unseen hostile eyes, and the impression was correct enough, for a considerable part of the town was commanded by the German observation posts. In the station my companion, Captain Semenoff, was saluted by a German bullet, which hit the wall behind him and fell to the ground at his feet, providing him with a valued souvenir.

There were barricades and barbed wire everywhere, and the Germans were welcome to try and storm Arras when they pleased. As for the houses, they sometimes

provided that mixture of comedy and tragedy which moves at once to tears and laughter. Some there were from which the front wall had been shorn clean away, leaving three or four rooms one above the other, open to the public gaze like a scene in a theatre. At the back of such rooms all the treasured objects were still where loving hands had placed them—pictures on the walls, a bookcase full of books, a piano with photograph frames still upon it. In front of them were chairs, tables, cupboards, and the like, with two or three legs still on the parquet floor and the rest of themselves balanced, in defiance of all the laws of equilibrium, over the nothingness where the shell had passed. Some houses seemed at first sight to have escaped all damage, and it was only when one looked more closely that one found they were nothing but a façade, and that their windows were like the eyes of a blind man.

Despite bombardments, the streets of Arras were admirably kept. When a shell tore a hole in a roadway, the hole was first of all fenced off—a very necessary precaution, since some of the projectiles broke through the vaults of deep cellars, opening a chasm fifty feet deep. Then, when possible, the hole was filled with débris, and cobbles were laid down.

Arras might well have been called a city of the dead had it not lacked the most impressive mark of desolation—silence. Almost always there was the roar of cannon and the wild hurtling of huge projectiles that tore through the air with the noise of a runaway train on invisible metals far above.

For a minute or so, however, I experienced the silence of Arras—a silence sadder and more impressive than that of the desert. Evening was closing in, and

the guns had declared a mutual truce. We were in the cathedral, which in the past was an ugly eighteenth century building, heavy and ungraceful. Now, however, great clefts had been opened in its sides and roof, letting in a glorious vision of the sunset sky; its masonry, threatening to fall at any moment, hung suspended as though it were lighter than air; and huge arches still remained aloft, balanced fantastically, beyond the maddest dreams of architecture, on a single column. We found only one person in the cathedral—a bearded soldier who before the war was a well-known artist, and he was painting the strange vision of the half-ruined cathedral. We all spoke in whispers, lest we might break the unaccustomed silence. "Look!" he whispered; "look at the golden light on the pillars and the glory of the sunset behind! Surely its beauty is almost a justification of the war!"

A few minutes later the truce was ended. The guns broke out anew, and passing round the Tournant de la Mort, we bade a long farewell to Arras.

North of Arras lies the battlefield which has made the name of the humble village of Souchez famous throughout the world. We were the first civilians to reach Souchez after the great French offensive in September, 1915. Of all villages in the French firing line Souchez was one of the least accessible. Visitors were sternly discouraged by the Germans, who had a habit of covering its approaches with an impenetrable screen of shells, in the hope of preventing the revictualling of the trenches on the Vimy slopes. Since its capture on September 26th no civilian had set foot there. "Souchez," said the French staff officer who was guiding us, "is distinctly not a healthy place of

residence. Three times I have tried to get down the valley from Carency, and each time I was turned back by a terrific *feu de barrage* that made the whole place into an inferno in which nothing could live ! ”

The General himself had said that we had not the faintest chance of reaching Souchez alive. But, as luck would have it, we had the extraordinary fortune of striking the first calm day since the offensive. There were a few German shells bursting near Carency, but the enemy's attention was mainly directed to the French positions on Notre Dame de Lorette and Ablain St. Nazaire. For the moment the road to Souchez seemed clear, and we set out along the track of the light railway which once connected Carency with Souchez and Lens.

The permanent way was torn to pieces with shell-holes of every size, all full of muddy water, and the blast of high explosives and flying splinters had twisted and distorted the rails into maniacal shapes. Elsewhere it was autumn, and the leaves were falling ; here it was mid-winter, after some terrible storm, for nearly every tree had been mown down, and the branches of those that were still standing had been mercilessly lopped, so that there was scarcely a leaf to be seen. As with difficulty we made our way through the swamp we had every reason to appreciate the obstacles which the French troops had overcome. The barbed wire that they had broken through as though it were string was still a serious impediment to the unhurried pedestrian, and the trenches were still littered with the equipment abandoned by the enemy.

The guns on either side were firing away merrily when we reached what was once the station of Souchez,

with the Château de Caricul just behind it, but still the enemy had no attention for us, and his shells were falling in the adjacent valleys. You could recognise the station at Souchez by two rusty steel skeletons, in which there was literally not an inch that had not received its bullet or shell splinter. Close inspection showed that they once were engines. As for the Château de Carieul, it is said that its owner intended before the war to have it demolished and build himself a new *château*. The French and the German artillery spared him the expense of demolition. The foundations of the *château* still remained marked out by piles of débris. It is to be feared, however, that when peace comes the builders will have anything but an easy task, for the site of the *château* is about as even as a relief map of the Alps.

From Carieul we walked on through the remains of the wood of Souchez. *Souchez fuit!* Troy itself was not destroyed so utterly, and few villages in France or Belgium have during this war vanished so completely from the face of the earth. It is not that there is no one stone left upon another; there is scarcely one whole stone or whole brick left. Everything, except wood, which still resists in blackened splinters, has been ground to powder. The whole configuration of the place had been changed beyond all recognition. One could not trace the outline of a road or a house. Where there had been a hill a series of big shells had made a hollow and a dismal pond, across which, to my amazement, I saw a kingfisher dart like a flash of living light; where there had been a hollow the débris and brick-dust had made a hill. We looked in silence on this scene of mystery and desolation, and took such

comfort as we could from the thought that it had cost far more to destroy Souchez than it would cost to rebuild a hundred such villages.

The evening was beginning to close in on us, and we had just started back towards Carency, when there came the angry whistle of an approaching shell, and a "Boom!" and column of smoke rising from a point quite near where we had been standing showed that the Germans, under whose observation we had been for the last hour, had thought us worthy of a shell. A rifle shot or two echoed through the valley; the guns growled a few more times, and then there came a silence and the peace of the evening, which was not broken till we were once more back in the lamentable ruins of Carency, which, after Souchez, seemed quite comfortable and civilised.

It was at Souchez itself, among the ruins, that a staff officer explained to us the fortunes of the battle.

Perhaps some day a great artist will paint the picture of General Foch, the Commander of the Group of the Armies of the North, directing the operations, as he was described to us. The General's headquarters were in the long, narrow gallery of a French *château*, rather cold and draughty and lighted by long windows, which looked down from the first storey on a fine park that had already become unkempt with the neglect of war. In the heavy rain the two little lakes, which are its main adornment, looked very cold and melancholy.

In the gallery the officers of the general staff were hard at work receiving reports from the firing line and transmitting orders. There was a strange, unnatural silence in the room. The officers talked to one another

in whispers and moved to and fro on tiptoe, shamefacedly conscious of the creaking of their heavy riding boots. At the end of the room there was a stand against the wall, and on it was an enormous map of Artois, covered with a complicated tracery of coloured lines, marking the French and German trenches.

In an armchair in front of the map was sitting the Commander of the Group of the Armies of the North—a man of slight and athletic build, with a true horseman's figure. When he walked every movement was full of nervous energy and vigorous decision. The eyes were keen and piercing, and the chin dogged and resolute. A born leader of men, he was made to obtain information rather than to give it, to ask questions rather than to answer them, and having judged his man and summed up the situation, he had the faculty of commanding with unerring swiftness. Almost the whole day of the offensive in Artois he spent in the armchair before the great map. Sometimes thrown right back, with booted legs stretched out, tugging fiercely at his brown moustache, he solved some knotty problem of the advance; sometimes leaning forward on his chair and in his right hand a long ruler, he measured distances and estimated the results achieved.

As the reports came in and as the General sent out his orders his officers, fearful lest the smallest sound should disturb his calculations, threw anxious glances towards him and judged from his attitude and expression how things were prospering in the trenches twenty miles away, whither all their thoughts were turned.

There was far less strain and anxiety and far more gaiety in the deep and muddy ditches, where the men

were mustering for the attack, than in the silent room where a master mind was directing all their movements. There were among them many young men just over twenty—recruits of the 1915 contingent, madly eager to win their spurs. "With such men," one of their colonels told me, "nothing can stop us! No losses have any effect on them. A man falls; they mutter, '*Tant pis!*' and rush on to avenge him! As for discipline, they are splendid. With 3,000 men, despite war severity, I do not give two trivial punishments a week."

For the past few days they had been watching with glee the terrific bombardment of the enemy's positions which is in modern warfare the indispensable preliminary to a general assault. They knew that it was bringing nearer the moment for which they were longing—the scramble from the trenches, the charge, and the hand-to-hand tussle with the hated Boches. Their officers found it hard to prevent their climbing up on the parapets of their trenches to watch the effect of the French shells and thus exposing themselves to the German reply, which fortunately, overwhelmed by the weight of metal, was relatively feeble. They had been in the trenches for months, and had never had a chance of measuring themselves man to man with the Germans.

An aviator who was directing the fire told me that no words could describe the intensity of the bombardment. Looking down from above, all that he could perceive was a dense, all-enveloping cloud of earth and smoke. A volcano might suddenly have broken out in the valley of Souchez. "What it must have been for the men on whom those shells were raining," he said,

" I cannot imagine ! Ten thousand feet above them it was absolutely paralysing ! "

On the morning of September 25th, while the British further north swept down on the plain of Lens and captured Loos, the bombardment still continued, and the excitement and enthusiasm in the French trenches steadily increased. Soon after noon, when the German general staff was sending every man it could spare to check the British advance, the bombardment suddenly ceased, and the jokes in the trenches redoubled. The French soldiers in their mud-stained, pale blue uniforms, their heads protected with the blue steel trench helmets, looked to their weapons.

As in Champagne, the bayonet and the grenade were the favourite weapons, and each man chose the arm best suited to his temperament. The African troops prefer cold steel, and their favourite attack is first an irresistible wave of bayonets and then a second wave of men armed with knives and magazine pistols, " to clean up the trenches," as they say expressively. With those young French troops grenade and bayonet went side by side. The Parisian, it is said, has a preference for the bayonet, while the provincial, generally speaking, considers it cleaner and more expeditious to hurl his grenades—knobbed balls of steel, about the size of a cricket ball—into the " funk-holes," where the enemy is crouching for shelter from the storm.

The French soldier fights best when he knows exactly the immediate object for which he is fighting, and every man on the Artois front knew, not only the precise duty which he was to perform, but also the general strategical purposes of his chiefs. Souchez is a

door leading through the last spurs of the heights of Artois into the plain of Lens, and the principal object of the French operations in this district was to force open this door slowly and surely, despite the pressure of the Germans and their strong positions. On the north the hill of Notre Dame de Lorette, rising to a height of 340 feet, and on the south the heights of Vimy—which reach an altitude of 390 feet immediately above Souchez, and of which the culminating point lies half a mile further west, at an altitude of 460 feet—bar the way, and Souchez is situated between them, in the narrow valley through which flows the stream from which it takes its name. The Souchez is formed by the confluence of two streams—the St. Nazaire, which runs down a small valley from Ablain St. Nazaire, immediately below the steep slopes of Notre Dame de Lorette, and the Carency, which runs down from Carency village to meet the St. Nazaire at Souchez.

To reach the plain on the east the French, whose lines at this point ran, roughly speaking, north and south, were bound to pass through the valley of the Souchez, and this passage was only possible if they held the commanding heights of Notre Dame de Lorette and Vimy. In the spring of 1915 the French began their advance on Souchez from the north, and on September 24th they held Notre Dame de Lorette, Ablain St. Nazaire, and Carency. The enemy still clung to Souchez and the heights of Vimy above it, and it was from those positions that the French sought to dislodge him.

Apart from this general notion of the attack, every French soldier knew the precise nature of the task which he was to perform. In the gallery where the general

staff was working the engravings of the *château* were covered with aeroplane photographs of the German lines, and, thanks to these photographs, the exact position of every German trench was known. Each man had in his head a clear idea of the defences through which he would have to fight his way. He knew their names, and it was a common enough joke for one soldier to say to his comrades before he scrambled out of the trenches: "*Au revoir!* We shall meet in the Tranchée des Walkyries" or "the Tranchée de Leipzig."

In many important respects fighting in Artois differed from fighting in Champagne, and in certain ways the task of the French troops in Artois was more difficult and less exhilarating than that of their fellows in Champagne.

In Artois the men were massed on a far narrower front. The opposing lines had been pushed up so close together that the heavy artillery had not been able to wipe out the first line of defences, as it did in Champagne. The risk of the big shells falling into the French trenches was too great, so the work was done by the 75's, which, though incomparable when the enemy has been driven out of his cover, are not sufficiently powerful to shatter his earthworks completely. The heavy artillery had made up for this handicap by tearing to pieces the less advanced lines, and in their defence the Germans, as a general rule, adopted the tactics of massing the bulk of their men in the front trenches and holding the second line with relatively small force.

The trenches were so close together that the men had no chance of enjoying the mad intoxication of a wild rush across the open. In Champagne, once they

had left their earthworks the French kept above ground and pelted the Germans with grenades from the parapets above. In Artois they had only to scramble over a yard or two of debatable ground, thickly encumbered with barbed wire, and then to jump down into the enemy's trench, hurling grenades, stabbing with knife and bayonet, and then, clambering over the piled-up corpses, slipping and falling in the mud, to fight their way along the narrow communication trenches, where there was scarcely room for two men abreast.

In Artois, too, the mud was far worse than in Champagne. The Germans had dammed the Carency and turned the valley between Carency and Souchez into a swamp, in which the craters formed by the big shells made an inextricable network of deep ponds.

Another speciality of the Artois struggle was the street fighting. Nearly all the houses of the French villages have large cellars, and the Germans, burrowing like moles, in their favourite manner, had linked up these cellars underground and, thanks to a labyrinth of subterranean passages, could mass their men at any given point unseen and unsuspected.

At Neuville St. Vaast they entered the village by a double tunnel, of which the French were unable to discover the position. It was only destroyed by a considerable expenditure of eight-inch shells, which were dropped in a semi-circle across the patch of ground under which the tunnel was believed to pass, until they broke through into it and blocked it up completely. In the offensive of September 25th and the succeeding days there was less of this street fighting than in the preceding spring, for though Souchez had

been converted into a subterranean fortress, it was a few hundred yards behind the first German lines, and the French heavy guns had been able to turn its tunnels and underground shelters into death-traps from which there was no escape.

In the circumstances, however, it was inevitable that the progress should be less rapid than in Champagne. The first day the French carried, roughly speaking, the first line of trenches from the north-west corner of Souchez to Neuville St. Vaast. In this line the most important point was the Château de Carieul, a pile of ruins which the Germans had converted into a stronghold they thought impregnable. In some mysterious fashion the French forced their way down the valley from Carency along the light railway which once connected Carency with Souchez and Lens. The damming of the stream had persuaded the enemy that their position was unassailable, but nothing could stop the French troops. Forcing their way through the barbed wire, dragging themselves out of shell-holes into which they had slipped, to be buried over the waist in mud and slime, jumping over the trunks of big trees which had been laid low by gunfire, they burst into the German trenches, their bayonets and grenades spreading terror before them. The enemy surrendered or fled, throwing away rifles, unused grenades, everything that could impede his flight down the tortuous trenches.

Sometimes the French rush would die away before a mitrailleuse. In several cases the Germans had posted their machine-guns a few yards in advance of their trenches in a big shell crater, and had then roofed over the hole, leaving only a tiny gap for the barrel

of the gun. This device gave considerable trouble, as the French were unable to locate the position of the machine-gun that was troubling them. But these checks were only temporary. The wave of men swept round the obstacle and in upon it from behind. Then a few well-directed grenades, and the machine-gun ceased to speak.

Often the communication trenches were blocked with piles of dead, and the men had to scramble up over the bodies to the high parapets, run on a yard or two, and then jump down again into the clayey mud, in pursuit of the panic-stricken foe.

". . . And in the mist
Was many a noble deed, many a base,
And chance and craft and strength in single fights."

How many heroic deeds lost to fame were done that day none can say. There is something Homeric in the story told me by an infantry captain who led his men in the charge towards Souchez.

"We were in a communication trench," he said, "a private and I, chasing a German non-commissioned officer who had bolted out of a shelter. He vanished out of sight round a bend in the trench, and we went after him. As soon as he got round the bend we found that his flight had been stopped by a pile of German corpses. A big shell had completely destroyed the entrance to a shelter down which he might have dived, and he had turned to bay with one of those German grenades with a long handle in his right hand. Before I had time to think my private pushed me in a most disrespectful way against the side of the trench, plunged under my arm, saying, '*Mon capitaine*, your life is more valuable than mine!' and went for the German

with the bayonet. The German threw the grenade at him, but it did not go off, though it grazed his cheek. Seeing that the grenade had missed fire, the German threw up his hands and called out, '*Kamerad! Kamerad!*' '*Kamerad!*' shouted the private as he bayoneted his man; 'you should have said that earlier! I'll "*Kamerad!*" you!' "

It was on the 26th that the French captured the village of Souchez and pulled about 700 dazed German prisoners out of their demolished burrows. The 27th was spent in organising the captured ground, and on the 28th the French began their advance up the heights of Vimy from Souchez. The Germans had reinforced the three army corps holding the Artois front with the equivalent of three additional army corps taken from the troops held in reserve, but still the pressure of the French was too great. On the 28th they brought up two divisions of the Guard that had been in Russia on September 3rd and had arrived in Belgium about September 20th. They had been brought up to strength by the addition of contingents derived from the untrained Landsturm—men of between thirty-two and thirty-nine—who had since the war received a few months of military training.

It was against the Guard that the French troops advanced up the slopes of Vimy, and as they made their way up the hill they found the communication trenches packed so tight with men that they could hardly move. Some of the original Guard, men of about twenty-four, fought bravely, but they admitted that they were entirely stupefied by an artillery fire of which their experience in Russia had given them no idea. Pelted with grenades, played upon by the French artillery,

they filled the trenches with their dead, and the French swept on slowly and surely, until, after days of hard fighting, the whole of the western slope of the heights of Vimy and a considerable part of the wood of Givenchy, which spreads round the flank of the hills above the Souchez valley towards the plain of Lens, were in their hands.

It was terribly hard fighting, for the German defences were of tremendous strength. A single instance will suffice. Half-way up the slopes of Vimy there is a *chemin creux*—a sunk fence with a road running parallel with the crest. The Germans had turned the road into a trench, and had crowned its lower bank, which was some fifteen feet high, with a parapet. Then they burrowed from the edge of the road nearest the French deep down into the hillside, cutting flights of steps down into great subterranean shelters, each capable of holding half a company. All these shelters were connected with underground passages, and the road itself was cut up into sections by barricades, so that if a storming party succeeded in jumping into the road it would be in possession of only a section of the position, and would be exposed to a cross-fire from the barricades, while underground the Germans could concentrate their troops on any threatened section.

During the bombardment the German troops stood on the steps leading down to the shelters, and there they were in perfect safety from anything except a lucky shell that might burst in the angle between the road and the further bank. The French infantry, in their dash, reached the parapet of the road and leaped down into what seemed to be an unoccupied trench, only to be shot down from behind by the Germans on the

steps, who were invisible from above. The French were not slow, however, to grasp the situation, and as they sprang down every man who was not shot down turned hastily round and hurled his grenades with deadly effect into the closely packed mass of men on the steps.

By such desperate fighting the French carried all the German trenches on the western slopes of the heights of Vimy, and they even reached the crest, but here it was impossible to maintain their positions. The further slope of the hill—which it was practically impossible for the French artillery to reach, since it was a receding slope—was powerfully organised with German trenches protected with barbed wire, which, behind the brow of a hill, has little to fear from heavy projectiles. The summit of the hill was debatable ground, and both sides had established look-out posts there to direct the fire of their artillery.

Opposite the heights of Vimy, across the gap of Souchez, lies the famous hill of Notre Dame de Lorette. The day after our visit to Souchez we climbed up through endless trenches to its crest, where a few shattered stones marked the place of the chapel which had once given the hill its name. The colonel invited us to his quarters, and we were sitting there when there came a dull thud and a sound of earth falling down the staircase outside. "Another of those wretched landslips!" said the colonel as, tin coffee-cup in hand, he looked quickly out of the door. "I shall be glad when this 'dug-out' has been properly shored up!" From above came down a voice full of glee. It was a captain, who had been having a look at the German trenches. "A narrow shave!" he

shouted ; " a four-inch shell has just gone clean into the sandbags of the parapet above your heads, and it has not exploded ! If it had, we should have had to dig you out. How annoyed the Boches would be, if they knew ! It really is cruel, bad luck when, for once a shell does find a target, it doesn't go off ! "

We were sitting in a burrow twenty feet below the surface, and it did not strike one as a comfortable or even as a safe retreat. Originally it had been made by the Germans ; then it had been knocked to pieces by the French artillery, captured at the point of the bayonet, and more or less roughly restored by its captors. In summer it had been tolerable, but now the rainy season had begun, and the crumbling earth was breaking away everywhere. The mere impact of the shell in the sandbags above had been enough to bring down quite a lot of it. The colonel had just come into this sector, and the incident confirmed him in his determination to have more commodious and less rickety quarters prepared without delay.

The burrow consisted of two tiny rooms, reeking with damp. In the first room there were two orderlies, one of whom had to remain permanently in his bunk, as if both of them were up it was impossible for anyone to pass through to the colonel's room beyond. The recumbent man saluted solemnly as we came in. "*C'est une drôle d'existence*," he remarked cheerfully ; " we have been here three days, and I have spent nearly the whole time on my back trying to read by candlelight. As soon as I get up I am always in someone's way ! "

The colonel's room was a little larger. We discovered by experiment that exactly five people could be

fitted into it—three on the colonel's bunk (which, as its foundation was made of ordinary wire netting, threatened to give way under the strain), one on a stool, and one on the table. The five, once in, could only leave the room in the same order as that in which they entered it.

No material discomfort could prevail against the cheerfulness and good humour of the colonel and the captain, who gave us such a welcome as the stranger can only hope to find in the trenches. They insisted on providing coffee, which was made with great dexterity by the non-recumbent orderly. Their hospitality was fully appreciated, for we were thoroughly wet through, after tramping through the network of trenches which crowned the summit of Notre Dame de Lorette. Fatigue parties were at work scraping up the mud as best they could, but theirs was a thankless task, and if they succeeded in keeping some of the main arteries tolerably clean, Hercules himself could not have coped with the mud in the subsidiary trenches. Wooden gratings were being hastily sent up from the rear to keep the men above the slime, but it was the transition period between autumn and winter, and only a few had yet been received, just enough to put down in the worst places, where they were no manner of good, since they promptly disappeared in eighteen inches of slush.

The men who held these trenches were Southerners—Gascons and Béarnais for the most part—and their high spirits were proof against every trial. "It is tiring," said one of them in the *patois* which they boast was the language of Henry IV. ; "very likely we shall die here ; *mais, Dieu vivant, nous les aurons !*"

The colonel spoke with tears in his eyes of their courage in the assault of September and of their imperturbable cheerfulness in every circumstance. "The smallest thing," he said, "amuses them and makes them laugh. One of their amusements is to invent absurd answers to the question, 'When will the war end?' The most popular reply at present is, 'When there are no more *poilus* left!' " "They are childish and heroic at the same time," said the captain. "I went out with a corporal the other evening to reconnoitre a German trench that was believed to be deserted. The corporal was a little ahead of me, when there was a shot, and he fell mortally wounded. His last words were, '*N'avancez pas, mon capitaine ! Ils sont là !*' Not a thought for himself, only for his officer!"

Under cover of a flanking spur we left the trenches and scrambled down the hillside into a ruined village, which we reached just as evening was closing in. The German field guns sent us a few shells to speed us on our way. We found our motor-car waiting for us, and started slowly back towards the rear. We soon came to a standstill, for the road was blocked by a battery of 75's, which were waiting, hidden from the enemy behind the ruins of an inn, until it was dark enough for them to go forward and take up the new position that had been prepared for them. As we crawled past, with one wheel in the ditch, I heard a voice calling my name. Amazed, I turned round and saw a burly *maréchal des logis* standing on the footboard with his hand held out to me. There was something familiar about his face, something that suggested that he must be the near relation of a friend or acquaintance, but I

felt sure that I had never seen the man before. "Don't you recognise me?" he asked, mentioning his name. Then I remembered a day in August, 1914, when I said good-bye to a pale-faced, narrow-chested clerk, who scarcely tried to hide his misery at being called out for active service. It was the same man, converted by a miracle into an uproariously cheerful, round-faced, broad-shouldered veteran.

"I have changed!" he said, laughing. "Haven't I grown fat! I am *maréchal des logis* now, and I have been recommended for the Croix de Guerre. Really, you know, if it was not for one's relations, for a young man *la guerre c'est le rêve!*"

He had just time to give me messages for the relations whose anxiety was the only cloud in his happiness when our car moved on again. It was rapidly growing dark, and a grey mist was closing over everything. As we passed along the country road we found it blocked with such crowds of men on foot and men on horseback, in carts, motor waggons, and motor buses, as one could scarcely find in the heart of a big city. For the moment had come when, under cover of the darkness, the advanced trenches could be revic-tualled and relieved, and we were at the point where horse and motor traction ended and where everything had to be carried forward by hand below the level of the ground down the narrow, zigzag communication trenches.

There were supplies of ammunition and, most important of all, endless cases of grenades. The trenches are so close together that the grenade is the ideal weapon in the hand-to-hand struggle which never ceases, and success or failure may depend on having

an ample provision. When the French were fighting their way up the slopes of Vinny, there was a long chain of men in the communication trenches right up the hill passing grenades, like fire buckets, from hand to hand, to overwhelm the Prussian Guard, which was still clinging to its trenches.

At least as important as the ammunition convoys were the *cuisines roulantes*, the camp kitchens, drawn by two mules or horses. The cooks, delighted at being under cover, were banking up their fires right royally, and the savoury steam of the soldiers' soup mingled in dense clouds with the evening mist. Of all the characters produced by the war none is more original or more popular than the cook, the "*cuistot*," as he is affectionately called. His name is a synonym for ingenuity, and there is no risk that he will not face in order to provide the *camarades* in the front line with the hot, steaming meal that renews strength and courage. Two men with a huge tin of soup suspended between them on a great stick, behind them a man or two laden with bread, will plod stoically along in the dark through the mud of the endless trenches, now and then clambering into the open with their heavy load when the trench is blocked, completely exposed to the enemy's fire. The other day three men were engaged on such an expedition, and while they were trying to find a way through the barbed wire a German shell exploded near them. One was killed and two were badly wounded, but the soup was not spilled. Men came out of the trenches to bring them in, and the only remark made by one of them, who, though terribly wounded, still remained conscious, was, "Who will carry the soup to *mon colonel*?"

After miles of motor waggons we passed endless lines of men, looking phantom-like in their pale blue uniforms, plastered yellow with mud. There was, however, nothing phantom-like about their voices as, laughing and joking, they trudged along to take up their duty within grip of the enemy. They were leaving the villages in the rear where they had been resting, and were making their way to discomfort and ever-present danger, yet they were as gay as a Parisian Sunday crowd.

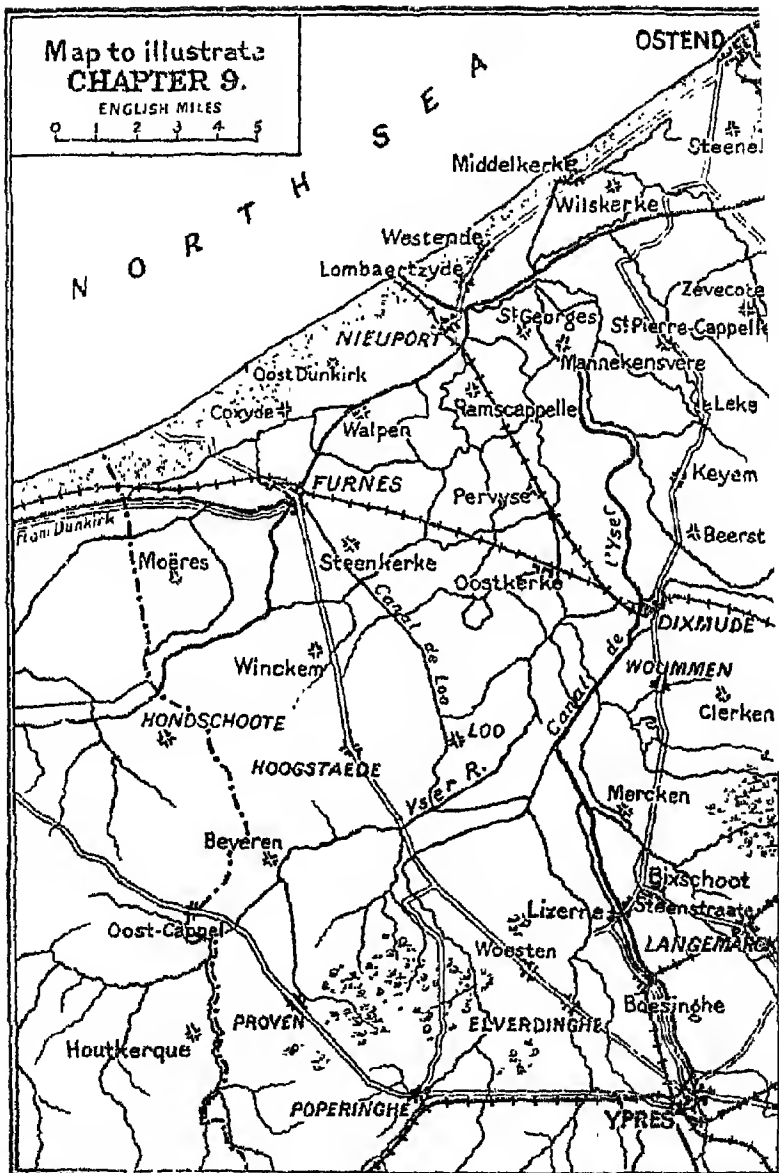
The German gunners were firing at random, hoping that their shells might find a convoy. Night had closed in, and through the mist above us there suddenly appeared bright spots of light, like fireflies on a summer evening. They were the *fusées lumineuses*, fired out over the enemy's trenches. Suspended from a little parachute, they hung in mid-air, lighting up everything near, though from a distance they were only pin-pricks of brightness in the night.

Over everything there was a sense of unreality. Whether or no my friend was right when he said that "for a young man *la guerre c'est le rêve*," at that moment, at any rate, war seemed a dream.

Map to illustrate
CHAPTER 9.

ENGLISH MILES

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Stanford Geog. Inst., London.

CHAPTER IX

THE EXTREME LEFT: NIEUPORT

"*L'HOMME de l'extrême gauche*," the man of the extreme left, was a little smiling man with a thin moustache, extremely short and mightily pleased at his own small stature, because it afforded so small a target to a splinter or bullet. He was standing there among the sand dunes, enjoying the sun and leaning upon his rifle as he gazed out across the sea, on which no enemy ship dare show herself.

The extreme left of the Franco-British line is based on the British fleet; the right wing is based on the mountainous bastion of Switzerland, and, as I have described elsewhere, its apparent limit is an ordinary barbed wire fence, such as marks the boundary of many an English pasture. The limit on the left is the North Sea, which one day in February, 1916, when I visited this section of the front, was rolling in sleepily with turgid waves, suggesting, in the fitful sunlight, something of the opalescent colour of absinthe mixing with water.

At the point where land and sea met, for an Englishman the breath of freedom was in the air. On the Continent one might feel that civilisation was besieged and hard beset, but at the sight of the sea, over which the British flag was flying supreme, one

knew that it was the German barbarian who was compassed round and vainly trying to force a passage out into the civilised world.

The scenery from Dunkirk to the mouth of the Yser is melancholy and monotonous, endless sand dunes of fantastic shape, which have been converted into trench fortresses. The men stationed there had one great advantage: the sand was always dry, and mud was quite unknown.

To a foreigner there is little that is attractive in the country; it is merely curious and depressing. But to a Belgian it is home—a home that is a thousand times more dear and precious because there is so little of it left. I shall never forget with what reverence and joy a Belgian deputy who was with me knelt down and scooped up a handful of sand, which he placed preciousy in an old tobacco pouch, so that he might take it with him in his exile as a relic of his own country.

The little seaside pleasure towns in Flanders had suffered cruelly, and their sufferings had a touch of the absurd, because the hotels and villas were so obviously intended for the pleasures of peace, and seemed utterly out of place when they were converted into fortresses and surrounded with trenches and barbed wire.

The day was a calm one—at least, for this war; that is to say, the guns were booming intermittently, and the Germans were not wasting more than thirty or forty shells an hour in blowing big holes in the crisp sand. From far out at sea there came a deeper boom—the sound of British monitors shelling the coast somewhere near Ostend. They were so far out at

sea that their position was only shown by faint wisps of smoke, but we had seen at close quarters the strangely shaped, clumsy craft, with their heavy armament, and could imagine the scene in their turrets as they sought with their big shells for the German batteries.

From the beginning of the war to the conclusion of the wild race to the sea the Germans struggled desperately to turn the Allied left wing. When their attempt was finally checked by the North Sea and the British fleet, it was natural that the Allies should organise their position on the shore with the utmost strength. The left wing was—it is still—a cardinal point of the line across Europe, and a German success there would have far-reaching consequences, so that nowhere along the line were the works of defence more carefully thought out and prepared. Inevitably they centred round Nieuport, which, once a prosperous watering-place, is now some four or five miles from the sea.

Few places have suffered more from bombardment than Nieuport. Scarcely a house was left habitable, and not one that was not more or less damaged. The Germans were prodigally lavish in the heavy shells which they hurled on the town, and the destruction had that completeness which only results from the use of high explosives in large quantities. The cathedral was as utterly ruined as the Roman Forum. When I was there, an eight-inch shell had just struck one of its towers and torn out huge solid blocks of masonry as big as a small house. What was left of the tower was in a state of unstable equilibrium, and every now and then there would come a crash of a big stone breaking loose

and falling heavily on the pavement below. Between two arches a portion of the roof still remained, and in the giddy way in which it arched over it recalled the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla.

Nieuport was under snow at the time, and it would be hard to imagine anything more picturesque than these ruins glistening in the sun—ruins which one would expect to date back to some far distant century of vandalism. The birds, which were so rare in the ruined towns and villages of France, had not deserted Nieuport. They were there in flights—starlings for the most part—chattering about round the fallen towers and quite regardless of the roar of guns. Below them lay a little cemetery, in which are buried the *fusiliers marins* who had fallen in the battles of the Yser. Some of the graves were adorned with statues of saints taken from the shrines in the cathedral. In nearly every case the names on the crosses are those uncouth Breton names which seem to possess in their very spelling a faint savour of the open sea.

Nieuport was a place of cardinal importance, since on its defence depended the long line of floods which protect some twenty miles of the front. On the extreme left of the line one gained the impression that water was the principal bulwark against the German advance: on the one hand the North Sea, with the British fleet which guarded the wing; on the other hand, miles and miles of floods. These floods, often 600 or 800 yards across, recalled the meadows at Oxford after a rapid rise of the Isis. There was only one curious difference—that is, the hundreds of posts that rose up out of them and which marked not the limit of a field,

but the position of barbed wire entanglements deep in water.

Beneath the five or six feet of muddy water lay the bodies of many thousand Germans, who, with their artillery, were surprised by the rush of the flood. Some of them on higher ground prolonged a miserable existence for an hour or two, and some, indeed, are said to have survived for quite a considerable time by climbing on the heaps of the bodies of their companions who had been killed by shell or bullet.

In such a district trenches were, of course, impossible. Earthworks had to be built above the ground, and the dykes and causeways of the country afforded long lines of fortresses ready made. These dykes were fortified and strengthened until they were proof against the largest shell, and furnished excellent shelter to the Belgian troops, who were there in readiness to repel any attempt made by the Germans to cross the inundations. The opposing lines were often far apart, and long wooden foot-bridges were built out to listening posts, whence every movement of the enemy could be perceived. They might be destroyed by shell, but they were promptly rebuilt, and the work of destruction and reconstruction went on continually, as indeed it was going on all along the entire front.

It was no easy matter in the flat plains of Flanders to reach the advanced lines. The smallest eminence gave so wide a view that the enemy's look-outs could on a clear day spot a motor-car many miles away, and the German gunners were generally ready to welcome such a target. However, there is much mist in

Flanders, and under its cover it was possible to reach without danger points where in sunshine one would surely have been bombarded.

There was a certain village where several roads meet, near the junction between the French and British lines. Just before one reached it one passed a notice board advising motorists to slow down in readiness for a dangerous turning. That turning was still dangerous, though no longer from the point of view of collision. Indeed, it was far safer to take it at full speed, for thereby the risk of colliding with a shell or stray bullet was considerably reduced. Here the visitor could gather a very fair idea of the famous Flanders mud. Every cavity and depression on the day I visited the lines was full of water thinly frozen over, and one could only marvel at the magnificent patience and endurance of the men who stood for hours and days up to the knees in what was practically a freezing mixture.

Nowhere along the line was war more invisible than in Flanders. Literally, there was nothing to be seen. A misty grey line of trees, a ruined farmhouse, a stake or two with tangled barbed wire—that was all there was to show where the enemy was lying. Yet there was always the haunting impression, ever present on the front, that unseen hostile eyes were watching.

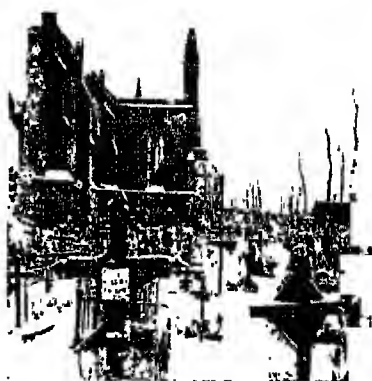
There was a certain sand dune scarcely to be distinguished from other sand dunes, except that perhaps it was a little higher. None the less it was important to see that motor-cars were drawn up out of sight of this dune, for it was in German hands, and their look-outs were always on the watch.



A DANGERON'S TURNING.



NIEUPORT CATHEDRAL, AFTER AN
8-IN. SHELL HAD DEMOLISHED
THE TOWER.



THE CEMETERY AT NIEUPORT.

As for our own defences, they were at first glance not very visible, but on closer inspection they proved most encouraging. A master mind had been at work, taking advantage of every little hill and depression in the monotonous plain. Was there a road or a field apt to be swept by a machine-gun? A few minutes' search would show an unobtrusive hummock which on approach proved to be a heavily defended machine-gun shelter, proof against everything but the largest shell. Was there a slope receding from the enemy where barbed wire entanglements could lie concealed from the enemy's artillery, to prove at the moment of the assault a fatal obstacle? There you would find neat rows of stakes intertwined with that deadly barrier which has done so much to change the whole system of warfare.

Occasionally the bare expanse was broken by a good-sized wood. In such flat country the cover given by trees was invaluable. Indeed, the undergrowth of a coppice was a far more powerful defence than the strongest wall of a mediæval castle. Such woods had been organised as veritable fortresses. They were surrounded by a girdle of barbed wire many yards across, and were cut by such a network of trenches and breastworks that it would be absurd to attempt an assault until the earthworks had been overwhelmed by a deluge of heavy shell. Even then, however, the garrison would be able to hold out, thanks to their massive shelters. Such a wood might hold a regiment, a brigade, a division, a veritable army, and its resistance could only be overcome at terrible cost by an enemy that had completely surrounded it. And as for surrounding it, the task was

almost impossible, for each work was based on other fortresses that flanked it, and the capture of a single stronghold would make no real impression on the line.

It was in a little village just behind one of these centres of resistance that we passed a French soldier's funeral. In its simplicity there was something deeply touching and truly expressive of the solemnity of a noble death. First there came a young soldier, in his faded blue uniform, carrying a wooden cross carved with the name and regiment. For the moment the cross served for the procession; later it was to be planted on the grave. Behind there came another private soldier, bearded and muddy, and it was only the ecclesiastical stole that he wore that showed he was a priest. As for the body, it was borne in a rickety little commissariat cart, with its blue-green tilt, drawn by a tired grey horse. Beside it marched a guard of the young veterans of France—youths scarce past twenty, who had seen nearly two years' service and who, in their battered trench helmets, looked the fine, useful soldiers they were. At the end of the procession came a little group of soldiers, who followed their friend to his last resting-place with all due reverence and with a certain bold tranquillity of demeanour that told of their long familiarity with death.

It was a desolate, melancholy country, and to the stranger the only gay thing about it was the windmills. Right up within the zone of fire they continued to throw up their arms with extravagant gestures to the skies, working away steadily at their daily task, despite the invader, with true Belgian persistence and obstinacy.

Some of them had been mutilated by the enemy's shell, and one I saw had only a single sail left, which still stood upright, as though defying the Germans a few hundred yards away.

In this land of dykes and canals perhaps the most interesting feature was the formidable barricades which prevented the flood water from reaching the sea and maintained the inundations which guarded the line. They were such barriers as had elsewhere along the front been raised to hold back the barbarians—thousands of sandbags neatly piled one on the other, and in time of frost, when the tide was low, covered with an armour of ice. Against such tremendous obstacles no bombardment could be effective. A lucky shell might displace a score or two of sandbags, but they could be replaced almost without delay, and the whole barrier would be only the stronger. So it was with the bridges; it took many score of big projectiles before a bridge was damaged, and then the damage could be repaired in a few hours, and the whole work of destruction had to be done over again.

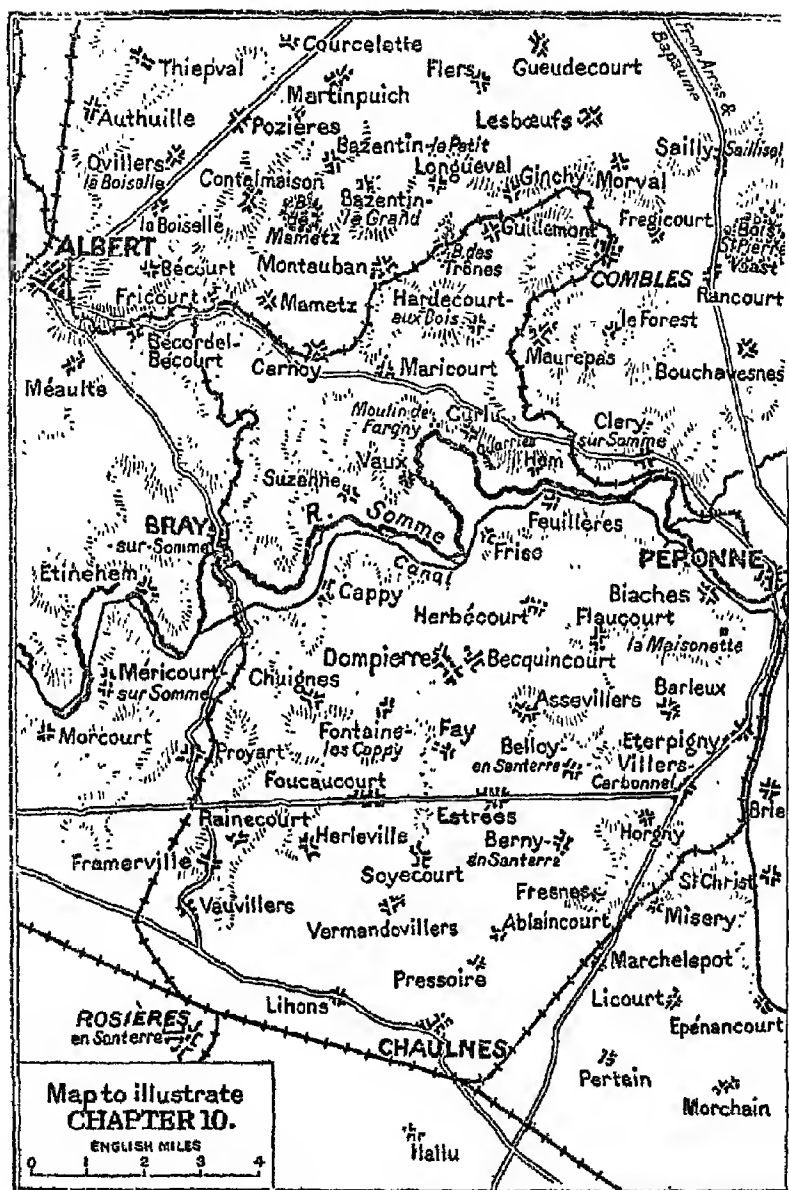
I visited, some five miles behind the firing line, an hospital that had been built at the cost of the American wife of a British officer. It was there that the men who had been most seriously wounded, and who required immediate operation, were taken in and nursed until they were able to be sent to the base hospitals in the interior. The doctor in charge considered that the position of his hospital was an ideal one, since, thanks to motor ambulances, the wounded could be brought down with a minimum of delay, and at the same time it was far enough away to give perfect tranquillity to

the patients and to allow the surgeons to operate without the nerve-racking disturbance of big shells bursting near.

He told us that during the early part of the war he had had a mortality of between twenty and twenty-five per cent. At that time he was in charge of a mobile field ambulance, and it was no small gratification to him that now, during trench warfare, he had been able to reduce the mortality to less than six per cent. "Yet," he said, "in trench warfare wounds are really more serious than they are in war in the open. The wounds made by grenades and trench mortars are particularly deadly, as the projectiles touch the ground before hitting the men and therefore infect the wounds. I estimate myself that nearly ninety-five per cent. of even slightly wounded cases are really serious unless they are immediately attended to, owing to the danger of gangrene."

The doctor laid great stress on the importance of a continuous interchange of surgeons between the front and the rest of the country. Surgery, he argued, had until the present war had no experience of the extraordinary wounds caused by modern weapons, and consequently the doctor who had never handled wounded men fresh from the field could have no idea of the difficulties with which the surgeon at the front had to cope. Thus he himself had received complaints from hospitals at the rear because it was supposed that he had in many cases unnecessarily removed a bone. As a matter of fact, the bone had been in those cases simply pulverised by the fragments of shells, as was shown by the X-ray photographs taken of the wounds.

In Flanders, as everywhere else on the French front, the doctors were loud in their praise of the stoical heroism of the French wounded and of that indomitable French gaiety which nothing could quell either in the field or the hospital.



CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION : THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

IN the preceding chapters the various sectors of the French front have been taken in geographical order, with one obvious and important omission. Nothing has been said concerning the French lines in Picardy north of Compiègne and south of Artois, the famous Somme front, on which, at the time of writing, the French troops, in combination with the British, are carrying out the most important offensive undertaken in France since the battle of the Marne.

Though the battle is still unfinished and there is every symptom that it may continue for many weeks, it forms a not unfitting conclusion to this book. It marks the end of one period of trench warfare. The tactics employed are the result of lessons learnt in Champagne, Artois, and round Verdun. All the problems raised by earlier battles—the importance of heavy artillery, the communications between the gunners and the advancing infantry, the halting of the wave of assault as soon as Maxims or barbed wire were met with intact—all these problems were carefully considered by the French and British military authorities, and the following account, which covers the first phase of the battle of the Somme, illustrates the solutions at which they arrived.

There is a second reason why the Somme offensive

may be regarded as marking a new stage in the European war. For the first time the complete unity of the Allied fronts has been accomplished. The main pivot of the battle of the Marne was the defence of Nancy. The issue of the whole battle depended on the French holding their ground in their positions round the Grand Couronné. The main pivot of the battle of the Somme, which is being fought on a vastly larger scale on the French, British, Italian, and Russian fronts, is to be found on the left or western wing. The chief object of our armies and those of the French is to hold so great a force of the enemy as to make the operation of our allies in the centre and on the right irresistible.

At the end of August the Germans had on the Western front one hundred and twenty-one infantry divisions and one cavalry division, of which no fewer than fifty-nine were active divisions; that is to say, the British and French had in front of them nearly two-thirds of the German army in the field, and many of these troops were the pick of the enemy's available forces. On the Eastern front the German forces consisted of fifty-three infantry divisions and ten cavalry divisions, and of these only eighteen were active divisions. There were also the Austro-Hungarian troops, which were certainly of inferior fighting value. They consisted of forty-seven infantry divisions and eleven cavalry divisions.

The effective pressure of the British and French combined armies against the German forces in the West was proved by the difficulty and hesitation with which the enemy attempted to reinforce his Eastern front against the great Russian offensive. At the

moment of the first shock on the East the Germans ventured to withdraw four divisions, and subsequently sent a single division, the 121st, from the West to the East. This division was withdrawn from the Somme, where it had suffered very heavy losses—3,500 men in prisoners alone and a large quantity of artillery.

At the end of August the Germans could not spare a single man from the Western front. Verdun and the Somme each required the presence of some twenty German divisions in the first line, and it was clear that the steady and methodical advance of the French and British would necessitate the maintenance of every available man on this front.

M. Briand's doctrine of the unity of front had been fully realised. On March 27th last he laid down at the Conference of Paris the following main principle on which the Allies should conduct the war against the Central Empires: "A single cause served by a single army fighting on a single front against a single enemy under one single control."

From the moment of the Somme battle it was possible to regard all fields of operation as forming part of a single whole. Germany did her utmost to anticipate and prevent the co-operation of the Allies by her wild assault on Verdun. At Verdun France held her ground, and defeated the German plan, with the result that M. Briand's system began slowly but surely to prove its efficiency. Not only did the French hold and indeed gain ground at Verdun, but in co-operation with the British they pushed back the Germans on the Somme. The Russians and Italians made the most of the situation, and their courage

and brilliant generalship brought about a decisive advance. When the day of final victory arrives, the effort of France and that admirable co-ordination of the Allied armies, so largely due to the genius of M. Briand, will be realised and appreciated by all those who have fought on the side of civilisation.

It was on July 1st, 1916, that the great Franco-British offensive began. At half-past seven that morning the excitement of a group of men in an observation post above the banks of the Somme, not far from Vaux, had almost reached breaking point. The terrific cannonade had slackened for a moment, and the gunners had lengthened their fuses. Shells were no longer bursting on the German advanced lines, which had been torn by shell-holes out of all recognition. It seemed that the moment for the long-expected assault had come ; but once or twice before the guns had given a respite to the German front trenches and then set to work again with renewed vigour.

For a time there was no movement to be seen in the French lines, only the outline of the trenches and the barbed wire stakes. The whole front seemed a solitary desert where nothing lived or stirred. Only in the background great clouds of smoke and dust rose from the second German line. Suddenly a single figure appeared—a French officer. He stood there motionless for what seemed an eternity of time, gazing at the Boche trenches. Then, turning round to the trench behind, he made a motion with his hand and started forwards towards the enemy. At once there arose out of the ground behind him another figure, then another and another, until a long line of men

had passed swiftly through the French barbed wire entanglements. In single file they went forward, sometimes running, but generally walking at a fairly quick pace. As they drew out from the lines they opened out into skirmishing order, and the scattered vanguard was continually fed by narrow streams of men moving endlessly out from the cover of the trenches.

Simultaneously all along the line the same movement was taking place. The sun shone brightly on the pale blue of the uniforms and the darker blue of the helmets. The men had been told that there was to be no hurry or disorder, and every officer was keeping his command strictly in hand. Whenever resistance was met with—it might be a machine-gun, or an entanglement, or a fortified position that had escaped from the storm of French shell and was still capable of harm—a halt was to be called, the infantry were to take cover and wait until the guns had swept the obstacle away.

In the first wave of men the bayonet was the chosen weapon. Each man carried a supply of grenades, but the grenade was chiefly used by the wave of men which followed, for nothing is better than the grenade for clearing a shelter of hidden Germans, while in the trenches themselves the revolver and the knife do deadly work.

The Germans were not slow to perceive the danger steadily and surely approaching. A word was sent to the batteries behind, and a heavy *feu de barrage* was opened to screen the German line. The enemy was using four-inch time shells—perhaps the most deadly of German projectiles, which, exploding in

the air, rain shrapnel directly downwards, like water from a shower-bath. Against such shells an advancing force can find no cover. It is useless to lie down or take refuge in a hole, since the shrapnel is falling from above. When they burst, these shells give out heavy greenish vapours, that cling together and retain their cloud shape for half a minute or more. The sun, striking on these little green clouds, played tricks with them such as it plays at dawn with the mountain mist, striking them with ever-changing opalescent colours.

The *feu de barrage* was powerless to stop the orderly advance of the French infantry. The shrapnel made a certain number of victims, and not a few men owed their lives to their steel helmets. But the French advance was not made only on the ground.

A fleet of aeroplanes, flying low, went forward with the infantry, marking their every movement and signalling it to the rear. As a rule aviator and infantryman move in widely sundered worlds, separated by thousands of feet of air. The infantryman on the ground below watches the duel of French and German airmen with eager sympathy, but it is a sympathy felt for someone very far away. In the great offensive on the Somme aviators and infantry for the first time went into battle close together, and each infantryman felt that he was in immediate communication with the aeroplane above his head. Many a soldier, as he paused for a breathing space, waved his hand approvingly to the aviator who was watching him from above.

The aeroplanes were only 500 or 600 feet up, and it was their duty to warn the French batteries behind as to the progress made, so that the men

should not suffer from the fire of their own guns. The progress of each unit was announced to the aviator above by *fanions*, little red-and-white or red-and-black flags, and by *panneaux*, signals like square notice boards, also painted red-and-white or red-and-black, which were carried by the leading files. Every soldier carried a supply of Bengal fires, to light as soon as a particular objective had been reached, and from the spectator's point of view not the least exciting feature of the battle was the blazing of these fires on the hillside deeper and deeper into the German lines.

This method, which was tried for the first time in the Somme attack, worked admirably. The kite balloons that were watching the battle from the rear were often at a loss as to the position of the advancing lines, but the airmen never made a mistake. To the inexpressible joy of the infantry, the French shells fell exactly where they were needed, just ahead of their ranks, and moved steadily forward with their progress. The aeroplanes received plenty of bullets and shrapnel in their wings, but not a single one was brought down.

When the French reached the first enemy lines they met, as a rule, with very feeble resistance. The Germans left alive had been stupefied by the terrible bombardment, and such resistance as there was always centred round an officer who had survived. Whenever an officer's cap was seen precautions had to be taken, but the men who had lost their officers surrendered without a blow. When ordered to go to the French lines, they dashed across the zone in which their own shells were bursting as hard as they could run, now and then throwing up their arms to show that they had surrendered and diving through the barbed wire

with the greatest agility, straining to reach the French trenches. A French officer told me that one of the most curious sights he saw during the battle was a number of German prisoners running down to the collecting station under cover of a communication trench, while exposed on the parapet above were the French reserves that were being sent up, running along in single file towards the enemy.

The Somme offensive was the brilliant result of a careful study of all the previous offensives of the present war, in particular that of the French in Champagne in September, 1915, and that of the Germans against Verdun. The Army of the Somme, which was one of the group of armies commanded by General Foch, was under the command of General Fayolle. He had reached the age limit before the outbreak of the war, and was actually on the retired list. It is a curious coincidence that, while General Pétain, the hero of Verdun, has followed General de Castelnau step by step in his commands and promotions, General Fayolle has, in the same manner, followed in the steps of General Pétain. He held a command in the French offensive in Artois in May, 1915, and again in the battle of Champagne, and consequently was able to profit by his personal experience in the battle of the Somme.

Previous offensives, by their merely partial successes, had raised a number of problems. On the one hand there was the question of artillery preparation. In Champagne this preparation had given good results, but after Verdun it became clear that more heavy artillery was necessary. With heavy artillery the problem of giving eyes to the gunners, who are miles and miles in the rear, becomes increasingly difficult.



THE MARSHES OF THE SOMME.



THE RUINS OF A SOMME VILLAGE.

The Germans first sought the solution in the kite balloon, or "sausage," which was a valuable supplement to the aeroplane. At first the Germans had practically a monopoly of the kite balloons, but by the date of the battle of the Somme the tables had been reversed. At the beginning of that battle, the Allied aeroplanes worked havoc among the German kite balloons, and the result was that on the first day of my visit to the Somme front during the great battle one could see twenty French kite balloons and not a single German. Despite all his efforts, the enemy had been able up to then to destroy only one French balloon, and that by an unsportsmanlike device which smacked of sailing under false colours. A German aeroplane, disguised as a French machine, with tricolour discs painted under its wings, succeeded in slipping through the French air patrols and destroyed one captive balloon with explosive bullets. The French in the Somme district had complete mastery of the air; consequently the German guns were blinded. If the enemy dared to run up a kite balloon, he found that the whole of his force of aeroplanes was required to protect it.

In this connection one of the great difficulties in the battle of Champagne was that of informing the artillery of the progress made by the infantry. This problem was most satisfactorily solved in the battle of the Somme by what the French call the "infantry aeroplanes," which I have already described.

Another very serious problem was that of bringing up the reserves. In Champagne they were brought up with terrible delay through the communication trenches. Regiments took hours and hours to cover

a mile in these narrow ditches, which were crammed with prisoners and wounded men going towards the rear. It was noticed on the first day of the Champagne battle that the artillery which went forward in the open suffered insignificant casualties. In the battle of the Somme the reserves were sent forward in the same formation as the first waves of the assault, with excellent results. Reinforcements arrived promptly, and the losses were not serious.

In the battle of Champagne the men left the trenches in a series of waves many miles long. The idea was that the impetus of the charge would carry them across all obstacles which still remained after the guns had done their work. The result inevitably was that units lost their formation, and that a certain confusion entered into the advance. Moreover, when barbed wire or a machine-gun escaped, the losses were necessarily heavy. On the Somme the advance was made as described—that is, in files opening out fan-shaped, with continual streams of reinforcements. The success of the new method of attack was admirably proved by the amount of ground gained with a minimum of loss.

The Germans had evidently realised before the battle that their defences on the Somme might prove unequal to resist the pressure of the French. On June 25th, at the very beginning of the artillery preparation—which reached its height only on the last three days of the month—they evacuated all the civilians in the threatened district. Previously there had been comparatively little fighting on the Somme. The villages had suffered relatively slight damage, and the Germans allowed the French inhabitants to remain in their houses, even when they were situated as close

to the French lines as at Dompierre, scarcely a mile from the advanced trenches. They no doubt considered that the presence of Frenchmen was a protection for them against bombardment by the French guns. On June 25th, however, every civilian was ordered to leave, and apparently very short notice was given. The peasants should not have been unprepared, since thousands of proclamations had been dropped by French aeroplanes among the villages announcing that the Allied armies were coming to their deliverance. When the peasants had gone the German soldiers set to work to pack up all the goods of any value that the peasants had left behind. Their purpose may be deduced from similar German behaviour in the past. But the bombardment increased in intensity with great rapidity, and very little of that loot reached the rear of the German lines. When the French troops entered the villages after their victorious sweep across the enemy's trenches, they found the streets littered with great bundles containing the most miscellaneous collections of goods, evidently looted from the neighbouring cottages.

After the first day's attack the enemy discovered that his worst fears as to the French offensive had been fulfilled, and that he had no chance of serious resistance on his first and second positions. He immediately withdrew, as far as was possible, all his advanced batteries that were not absolutely indispensable for the continuation of the struggle, in order to save them from the hands of the advancing French. This movement began on July 2nd, and there is every reason to believe that the batteries thus withdrawn found behind them no prepared emplacements, such as

had been regarded in trench warfare as absolutely necessary. They had to continue the struggle in the open and take their chance of being discovered by a French aviator and destroyed by the French batteries.

During the artillery preparation the French observed in the most methodical fashion the effect of their shells on the German lines. Patrols and reconnaissances were sent out to enter the enemy's trenches at various points and to report on their condition. The reports they brought in were very valuable, but they were necessarily of a very partial and local character.

The most important information was provided by aerial photography. Thanks to the French command of the air, every yard of the German lines had been photographed regularly from above, and in the photographs the exact extent of the damage done was most accurately shown. Every night maps of each sector were made, shaded in different colours, representing the various degrees of destruction due to the previous day's bombardment. These maps were invaluable in guiding the gunners and enabling them to concentrate their fire on points which had suffered the least.

It has always been an axiom of military science that the weakest point of the lines held by allied armies is to be found at their point of junction. It would be hard to find more conclusive testimony of the complete union of the Allies in the present war than the choice of that very junction for making the great assault.

The French left wing, which was in contact with the British army, held the north bank of the Somme; and, as was fitting, it was composed of the famous 20th Corps, the French 10th Legion. To the 20th Corps

belongs the 39th Division, the "Iron Division," which holds itself second to no infantry in the world. It is the boast of the French Ironsides that they are never elated by victory, since victory is their due, nor depressed by defeat, since they know that no troops in the world could have done better than they. On this occasion among the veterans who had seen all the hardest fighting of the war there was a certain sprinkling of young men who were coming under fire for the first time and were wildly eager to show themselves worthy of their corps. Together they formed the perfect combination of reckless dash and matured experience.

As the Iron Division, with the disciplined springy step that marks troops chosen from the chosen, marched down from the wooded hills north of the Somme to take up their position in the advanced lines, ready for the assault, not a few of them looked out across the marshes of the Somme to the promised land which they were to win by their valour. At their feet the Somme wound its sluggish stream in a great loop through marshes a mile or more in breadth. On the south side the stream breaks up into a hundred streams and channels, which meander between islands green with little bushes and thick reeds. On the north the hills descend abruptly to the river bank and shelter the villages of Curlu and Hem. Further back on the right, on a little hill, stands the village of Cléry. The French soldiers knew that Curlu and Hem were their first objectives, but their eyes were turned further afield to the horizon line between those villages and Cléry. There, outlined against the sky, was a straight, stiff row of little trees, such as one often sees

in France, marking the unswerving course of an important road. This particular avenue traced the line of the Péronne-Bapaume road, which follows the dominating crests of the hills above the Somme.

Every soldier knew that this line of trees was inevitably, owing to the lie of the ground, the principal objective, as a glance at the map suffices to show to anyone who has a slight knowledge of the district. The town of Péronne was often at that time put forward as one of the principal French objectives, but this suggestion did not take into account the conditions of modern warfare and the characteristics of the country in which the fighting was taking place.

In the rolling country of the Somme the hills run to no great altitude and are all of more or less the same height, so that it is rare to find a spot which gives a commanding view. In the modern theory of the offensive the artillery plays a predominant part, and a good observation post is of incalculable value. Once the crest of the hills between Bapaume and Péronne was forced, the French would hold not only the dominating position in that district, but also a line from which excellent views could be obtained. The fall of Péronne was a matter of minor importance compared with the success of gaining a footing on the high-road which led to it. It was on September 12th that the French succeeded in reaching the border of the Bapaume-Péronne road.

At 7.30 on the morning of July 1st the Iron Division opened the attack in the direction of Curlu. The opposing lines reached the Somme at a small hamlet called the Moulin de Fargny, about half-way between Vaux and Curlu. The first position the French had

to carry was a steep cliff known as the Gendarme's Hat. Between the Moulin de Fargny and Curlu the rounded hills that slope down towards the river suddenly drop away almost perpendicularly, leaving a bare cliff-side, the shape of which bears a vague resemblance to a cocked hat. The Germans had turned this cliff into a formidable fortress, with a line of trenches at its base, a second line cut midway across its steep face, and a third hewn along its crest, all these lines being connected by communication trenches that zigzagged down its precipitous descent.

The French guns had stripped the Gendarme's Hat of the little vegetation that it had once possessed, and had worked havoc among the German defences. The Iron Division made short work of the obstacles that remained. They swarmed up the steep hillside and across what was left of the triple line of trenches with acrobatic rapidity, while their comrades swept round from the less precipitous hills above and met them on the crest. In half an hour the aeroplanes announced that the whole of the Gendarme's Hat was taken, and the watchers behind could see the young soldiers of the Iron Division cheering themselves hoarse and waving their handkerchiefs on the trenches they had so brilliantly carried.

After a short halt the advance on Curlu was methodically resumed. The troops advancing along the river bank had on their right not only the river itself, but also the wide expanse of marshes. It was possible that Germans with machine-guns might be concealed in the marshy islands to which the French flank was exposed, and the troops went forward with every precaution. By 5 p.m. they had reached Curlu, but

in the village itself, on the higher ground round the church and cemetery, they met with a desperate resistance. The French artillery had demolished all the complicated defence works in the village itself, which was no more than a pile of ruins, but a portion of the very powerful underground fortress constructed by the enemy in the cemetery and in the walls of the church had escaped destruction, and one or two mitrailleuses remained uninjured.

In accordance with their orders, the French infantry halted and sent back word to the artillery behind. At six o'clock the fire of every gun available was concentrated on the church and cemetery of Curlu. In half an hour all was over. Church, cemetery, all the German defences, had been utterly shattered. The French infantry swept forward relentlessly, and by nine o'clock the whole village was in their hands. The Iron Division had reached the objective of the first day's attack, and set to work to fortify the conquered positions as best they could. Machine-guns were hastily brought up, and during the night a violent German counter-attack from the direction of Hardécourt was repulsed.

The resistance of the Germans round the church and cemetery of Curlu was characteristic of the fighting on the Somme. In this part of France the church and the cemetery are, as in England, generally side by side. In past wars civilised troops have, as far as possible, respected religion and paid at least a homage of reverence to death. The supreme contempt of the Germans for all things human and divine is a new fact in the history of civilisation. Even savages grant an armistice for the burial of the dead, and abstain

from profaning the tombs of past generations. Our present enemy sees in a church and in a country graveyard, with its carved headstones and ancient vaults, no more than a potential fortress.

Nothing is more pathetic than the appearance of such a graveyard after a battle. It is not so much the blind destruction worked by the shells as the enemy's deliberate purpose that affects one. Headstones, with their pious inscriptions, the railings round the grave, have been torn up to form barricades. Family vaults have been opened and their coffins taken out by irreverent hands and thrown no one knows where, so that the Huns may have a secure shelter, many feet below the ground, without the trouble of digging. Underground passages link vault to vault in the cemetery and join up with the vaults beneath the church, while cunningly contrived shelters for machine-guns are set at every point of vantage.

From July 2nd to July 4th the troops that had captured Curlu were engaged in organising the conquered ground, a work of tremendous difficulty and labour. On the 5th they were ready to continue their advance, and at seven in the morning the assault was resumed in the direction of the village of Hem, on the river bank. Two small woods, called Observation Post Wood and Cheese Wood, were carried, but the chief obstacle to be overcome was the quarries of Spahn and Eulenberg, on the hillside above the Somme, half-way between Curlu and Hem. These quarries had been very strongly fortified by the enemy, but the artillery had done its work, and by eleven o'clock wisps of blue smoke began to rise from them, and from the observation posts the French infantry

could be seen placidly cooking in the captured positions. By noon Hem was in French hands, and in the afternoon a German counter-attack was easily repulsed.

The next two days were devoted to organisation. The British had decided to attack on the 8th the Bois des Trônes, or Bois des Troncs, as it is variously called, which, as it enfiladed certain positions, was causing considerable trouble to the French as well as the British, and the General commanding the French left supported this attack by an advance in the direction of Hardécourt. The weather was unfortunately very bad, and the artillery was severely handicapped, but the French attack, which began at eleven o'clock, captured the village of Hardécourt. The Bois Favières, on the eastern borders of which a party of Germans had succeeded in maintaining themselves since the first day of the assault, was also completely cleared of the enemy.

The English troops, however, in spite of magnificent bravery, had been unable to progress during the morning. They had not abandoned the attempt, and as his objective had been attained, the French commander ordered the whole of the artillery of one of his divisions to be concentrated on the German lines opposite the British. It would be difficult to find a better example of the perfect unity of the Allies.

At 1 p.m. the British infantry returned to the charge, and hurled the enemy out of two-thirds of the contested wood. French officers were unsparing in their praise of the splendid dash with which this difficult operation was carried out and the incomparable steadiness and endurance of the English troops.

While on the French left, north of the Somme, the Iron Division was capturing Curlu, in the centre the Colonial Corps was advancing with a dash and brilliancy worthy of its high traditions. The first day's attack began at 9.30 a.m., and the Colonials were furious at the two and a half hours' start given to their comrades and allies when, before the assault, they heard that the British had captured Mametz and that the Iron Division was well on the road to Curlu. Apart, however, from this passing and not unnatural annoyance, everyone was in the highest spirits. The officers of one colonial regiment breakfasted together just before the assault, and never was there a gayer party.

There was only one officer who seemed silent and absent-minded—a captain who had always been the life and soul of the mess, even in the most dismal days of trench warfare. A cloud seemed to be hanging over him, and two of his friends, as they walked down to their posts in the advanced lines, commented on the captain's altered manner. "One might almost think," said one of them, "that he had a presentiment!" Presentiment or not, he was one of the first men to fall in the attack, struck by a bullet just as he was leaving the trenches at the head of his men.

The country in which the Colonial Corps was fighting was far less hilly than the sector north of the Somme. The principal obstacles to its advance consisted of the fortified villages of Frise, Dompierre, and Assevillers, so far as the first German position was concerned. The reports as to the effects of the artillery preparation on Dompierre were most satisfactory, and the colonial troops were ordered to carry this village, but stringent instructions were given that they were not to do more

than approach Frise and Assevillers, so that there might be no danger of their getting too far ahead of the rest of the line.

On the left and on the right the French troops carried out the task assigned to them with no great difficulty, establishing themselves on the southern edge of Frise and in the neighbourhood of Assevillers. In the centre the village of Dompierre was carried at the point of the bayonet in less than two hours.

Dompierre was an impressive example of the destructive power of heavy artillery. Up to June 25th it had suffered little, and its civilian inhabitants were still living in their homes. A week later its houses were mounds of powdered bricks, its church a pile of powdered stone not more than ten feet high, and, apart from the remains of the church, scarcely anything in the village was more than five feet above ground, except a fine tree at the cross-roads, of which the scarred trunk still rose some twenty feet into the air, though almost all its branches had been knocked off by flying splinters.

There is a fine exhilaration in following in the track of a successful advance. First our motor-car plunged boldly past notices in French and English forbidding any wheeled vehicles to go further, except at night. The time had passed when the German could overlook that road. Then one found oneself among the French trenches, that were once the first line and are now abandoned positions in the rear. A ruined sugar factory formed an integral part of these lines, and beyond it we were in what had been for months and months No Man's Land. A few yards further on we reached the German wire entanglements and entered

a zone inconceivably torn and shattered by high explosives. Scarcely a stake of the entanglements remained standing, scarcely a yard of barbed wire was unbroken. The infantry had been able to sweep over them as though they were non-existent.

Then progress became difficult. The German trenches had crossed the road, and gangs of men were hard at work filling up the gaps. After the trenches, with their shattered parapets and buried shelters, we passed the chaos of the Dompierre cemetery and entered the village. Every house in it had been organised as an underground fortress, only to be demolished by the French guns. In a farm, the only building that retained a semblance of its former shape, there was a shattered tower with a grey slate roof. It had once been an innocent *pigeonnier*, such as the French love. The Germans had chosen it for a flash-light station, from which they could communicate with a hill some six or seven miles in their rear. Inside the tower they had built themselves a shelter, strengthened with iron rails and sandbags, proof against anything smaller than an eight-inch shell striking its target fair and square. One day the eight-inch shells came. They tore the tower to pieces and blotted out the shelter, and that was the end of that signal station.

In the village of Dompierre there was scarcely a yard of ground without its shell-hole. The destruction recalled that portion of the German positions in Champagne which had suffered most from the French fire in September, 1915, the salient called by the French the "Pocket"; but in Champagne the work had been done by guns of smaller calibre, while at Dompierre each shell crater was three or four times

broader and deeper. Souchez, after months of bombardment by both sides, was a heap of broken stone and brick. In many parts of Dompierre it was as if fragments of stone and brick had been sifted, and only powder remained to tell where men had once built.

On July 2nd the Colonial Corps continued its advance. Herbécourt was taken, and Frise was found deserted, with an abandoned field battery in its ruins. A certain number of Germans had taken refuge in the marshes, out of which they were methodically hunted. On the 3rd the progress continued along the south bank of the river as far as Sormont Farm, opposite Cléry. Assevillers and Flaucourt were taken.

From this moment a change began to come over the operations. The first symptoms that the monotonous hammering of trench warfare might be nearing a conclusion became apparent. After the first day's attack the whole of the French artillery, including even heavy howitzers, began to advance. For the first time since the Champagne offensive the guns were actually in the open, without prepared emplacements. The enemy, too, had no emplacements for his batteries, and the work of the aeroplanes engaged in spotting the positions became far easier.

After the capture of Flaucourt a regiment of colonial cavalry had its chance. Patrols galloped out in all directions, and one sergeant, carried away by the enthusiasm of feeling himself again on horseback within reach of the enemy, actually rode into Belloy, which was still held by the Germans, and galloping back under heavy rifle fire, brought in valuable information.

The next day the Foreign Legion captured Belloy,



MILITARY ENGINEERS INSTALLING FIELD TELEPHONES IN THE REAR OF THE ADVANCING FRENCH
ON THE SOMME

link them up, but it was found that the enemy were far less well provided in this respect than the French. The German lines were only of sixteen-inch gauge, such as the French used in the trenches themselves, and their trucks were pushed by hand and not drawn by engines; consequently the French had to build fresh lines across the conquered ground.

Great attention had been paid by the French to the all-important question of water supply. In the present war troops have been frequently cut off from all communication with the rear by a barrage fire, and then thirst becomes a terrible foe. A postcard which reached Paris, only a few days before I wrote these lines, from a friend of mine, a major who was taken prisoner at Verdun, said that it was only thirst that had compelled him and the eighty men left of the 200 men of his command to surrender after they had been isolated for forty-eight hours.

In the Somme as soon as a village was taken a scientist was sent forward to test the water in the wells and to make sure that they had not been poisoned. With him there went an expert gang of well-sinkers, who wherever necessary set to work under the German shells to provide the troops with an unfailing supply of pure water. It was found that, as a rule, the water in the Somme villages was bad, though not poisoned, and it was possible to use the old wells after they had been thoroughly cleaned.

Another important task, which required days for its accomplishment, was the discovery of good observation posts for the artillery. The German observation posts, of course, had all their views the wrong way, and it took no small study of the ground to find the



HEAVY GUN GOING FORWARD TO SUPPORT THE ADVANCE.

best points overlooking the German positions. The mending of the roads cut up by trenches and riddled by shell-holes was in itself a superhuman labour. In these circumstances it was not surprising that progress should have been slow, and the only wonder was that it should have been possible to go ahead so fast.

It was intended that the French centre should attack simultaneously with the British and the French left wing on July 8th, but, in view of the bad weather, the attack was postponed till the following day. It resulted in the capture of Biaches, and was followed up on the 10th by the taking of La Maisonnette, a small eminence overlooking Péronne.

The French right wing, composed of the 35th Corps, attacked on July 1st simultaneously with the French centre, carrying Fay and reaching the western edge of Estrées. The 35th Corps consisted of Breton reservists, who charged with a dash of which the youngest troops might be proud. They had already distinguished themselves at Quennevières, by the side of the Zouaves, and on this occasion they charged singing "The Marseillaise."

On the 3rd the French artillery was concentrated on Estrées, which had been particularly strongly fortified by the enemy.

On the 4th the French carried what was left of Estrées, and so far as the right wing was concerned the first phase of the advance was concluded.

The 35th Corps had performed a difficult and brilliant manœuvre. They left their trenches facing east, and began a turning movement towards the south, thereby allowing the troops further to the north to continue

their advance, besides guaranteeing them against any surprise if their advance was checked. This movement exposed the troops carrying it out to the fire of distant German batteries, combined with an enfilading fire from the German guns in the south. Their turning movement also ran the risk of a counter-attack on the flank. It was a difficult tactical problem, which was perfectly solved.

The results of the first phase of the battle on the French side may be summed up as follows: "In less than a fortnight the French troops on a front ten miles long, with a maximum depth of six and a half miles, carried fifty square miles of fortifications. Their booty amounted to eighty-five guns (several of large calibre), 100 machine-guns, twenty-six *Minenwerfer*, 236 officers, and 12,000 men, besides large quantities of material of all kinds."

As the French high command had anticipated, after the rapid onslaught of the first few days progress became slower and more difficult. In trench warfare as soon as a point of the great fortress is seriously threatened, and the attacking party is so far engaged that it cannot withdraw the big guns and masses of men concentrated for the assault, the defenders can bring up all the forces they have to spare to protect the lines where there is danger of a breach opening. At that spot the defence may hold good, or at any rate may make the assailants' advance too slow to be profitable. Verdun may be regarded as a classic example of such an attack and such a failure.

But, it may be argued, in such a case trench warfare must end in stalemate, and perhaps a deadlock would be the probable solution, if on either side the resources

in men, guns, and ammunition were equal, though even so few students of history could doubt that the genius of a commander on either side might suffice to overcome the apparent impossibility of the situation. To the contemporary chronicler the present war seems singularly barren in such strokes of genius, though it may be that events are not yet seen in their proper perspective. Of the Eastern front I am not competent to speak; on the Western front there seems to have been just one conception worthy of the greatest generals of history, and that a cardinal conception—the strategic retreat which resulted in the battle of the Marne.

But to-day there is no longer an equality in resources between the belligerent Powers, and the superiority of the Allies is steadily growing. At Verdun the tide of battle ebbs and flows, but more and more the advantage inclines towards the French. On the Somme progress is slow and difficult, but the Somme and Verdun together are occupying forty German divisions, all engaged in the front lines. Meantime the Russians are pouring into Austria, and the Italians are approaching the gates of Trieste. At two points it seems that the barrier surrounding the Central Empires has begun to give way. Events at Salonica seem to foreshadow that before long the "navel string" uniting Germany and Turkey may be sundered once and for all.

The enemy may succeed for a time in closing the breaches, but he can only postpone the evil day. For as the Allied forces increase and the Teuton forces diminish fresh offensives will be opened, new points in the trench line attacked, until inevitably the pressure

from outside becomes too great and the Central Empires suffer the fate which awaits every beleaguered city that can hope for no succour from a relieving army.

When this day comes the great patience of France, which, with the aid of the heroic British army, has kept the trench line unbroken from Switzerland to the North Sea for nearly two years, will have achieved its purpose. That line has been the buckler behind which the Allies have developed and organised their resources for the final victory. Never, even in the days when she overran continents and conquered nations, has France played a more noble part in a more glorious epic.

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